

Stefan Krappitz

TROLL CULTURE

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE

Troll Culture

Diplomarbeit
Stefan Krappitz

Betreuerin: Prof. Olia Lialina

Merz Akademie
Hochschule für Gestaltung,
Kunst und Medien, Stuttgart

Wintersemester 2011/2012
Neue Medien

Diplomdatei: 1205

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Online content availible at wwwwwwwww.at/trolls

Introduction

Trolling is a phenomenon, that is normally covered in a very biased way. The usual tenor seems to be, that trolls are neckbearded basementdwellers without a life, or stupid bored teenagers that just hit puberty.
Hardly anyone has written about trolls in a positive way, other thatn the trolls themselves and most people wouldn't even go as far to associate trolling with the word culture, thus ignoring early online-communities like alt.flame.

Altough the word "to troll" was propably not mentioned in this context until the usenet of the early 90s, similar behaviour could even be seen in Socrates, who lures others into thinking of themselves as savants or scholars who then proceed to teach the, now famous, philosopher. This went on until Socrates asked questions, that questioned the whole philosophy of the other, leading to his realization to not know anything. This cannot be compared entirely to the trolls of modern days, but the phenomenon was there for a long time.
The Internet, however, amplified this behavior with anonymity, ephemerality and the following disinhibition of the mind.

In this thesis, I want to describe the phenomenon of trolling, as a culture.
By respecting the trolls, I wish to give a neutral summary to anybody interested in learning about it.

To do so, I will first examine the culture of the chans, especially 4chan, who are often said to be breeding grounds for trolls. By understanding the differences between modern social networks and sites like 4chan, we will explore the primum mobile behind the trolls actions, not by analyzing their behavior isolated, but with knowledge of the culture they often come from.

For the sake of neutrality, this book will teach you how to be a successful troll, just as it will teach you to avoid trolls and defend from them if they have already picked up on you.

4chan, anonymous and memes

Introduction to 4chan.org

Once I met a guy who knew suspiciously much about
internet-underground-culture.
It turned out he was a b-tard, a user of 4chans random board.
He described the site with one sentence. Beautiful and simple, yet precise:

> *“4chan is the worst and the best place on the internet at the same time!”*

The site might well be one of the most interesting places on the internet.
Here is a short definition from the site itself:

> *“4chan is a simple image-based bulletin board where anyone can post comments and share images. 4chan‘s collaborative-community format is copied from one of the most popular forums in Japan, Futaba Channel. Different boards are dedicated to different topics, from Japanese anime, manga, and culture to videogames, music, and photography. Users do not need to register a username before participating in the community.”*[1]

Most important is, that everybody is allowed to post anonymous.
Hardly any rules exist for both moderators and users.[2]
Also, there is no archive for old threads.
Every time someone creates a new thread or comments on an existing thread, it goes to the top of the first page and descends as newer threads appear or old threads get “bumped” to the top of page 1 from new replys.
15 threads are displayed on one page and in its often short life a thread sooner or later wanders to the bottom of the last page (for most boards that is 15 pages) and gets deleted.
Even the most popular threads will die sometime because of an image- and reply-limit. When this limit is reached, no more replys are allowed and the thread will be displaced by newer ones.

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1 4chan: FAQ. as of Dec. 06 2011
Url: http://www.4chan.org/faq

2 4chan: Rules. as of Dec. 06 2011
Url: http://www.4chan.org/rules

When it gets deleted, there are no copies or archives of the thread.
The most popular board by far is /b/, or “random”.
Here, hardly any rules, other than real-life laws (no child-porn for example), exist at all.

Since it has been titled by many as a paradise or homebase for trolls[3] it is important to get a basic understanding of 4chan and its culture before we can deeply analyze trolling.

History

4chan’s predecessors:

2channel and 2chan

Futaba Channel (or “2chan.org”) is a japanese imageboard not to be confused with the popular japanese textboard 2channel (2ch.net).
It’s predecessor textboard 2channel is widely popular in Japan with a world-wide Alexa-Rank of 309 and a rank of 19 in Japan.[4] This makes the website more popular in Japan than sites like blogspot.com or Windows Live.[5]
It consists of more than 600 active boards, which usually contain around 600 threads with a post limit of 1000 for each. The 2channel BBS has no focus on a certain topic.[6]

Altough it’s not an Imageboard like 4chan, anonymous posting is the norm on 2channel. Hiroyuki Nishimura, the creator of 2channel, shares Christopher Pooles views on anonymity by saying, that he only provides a platform on which people are free to decide what they do with it.[7]

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3 Mattathias Schwartz: The Trolls Among Us. as of Dec.06 2011
Url: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/03/magazine/03trolls-t.html

4 Alexa: Site Info of 2ch.net. as of Dec.15 2011
Url: http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/2ch.net

5 Alexa: Top Sites in Japan. as of Dec.15 2011
Url: http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries;0/JP

6 2channel: General Information. Translated by Google. as of Dec.16 2011
Url: http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=ja&tl=en&u=http%3A%2F%2Finfo.2ch.net%2Fguide%2F

7 Lisa Katayama: Meet Hiroyuki Nishimura. as of Dec.16 2011

In his book “Epic Win for Anonymous” Cole Stryker explains the huge success of the site by the nature of japanese culture. Since straight talk and audacity are often interpreted as rudeness or disrespect, 2channel is a place for emotionally repressed Japanese to vent, he says.[8]
According to shii, wikipedia admin, internetaddict and channelsphere celebrity, 2chan (also called Futaba chan) was created “on August 30th 2001, as a refuge for 2channel (or 2ch) users when 2channel was in danger of getting shut down from excessive internet traffic.”[9]
Today it is not used as a refuge anymore and has developed its own culture. The big difference in design is, that Futaba channel allows images to be posted alongside of the text, thus giving birth to todays channelsphere.
The original php-script of Futaba channel is still in use in countless modified forms. Even 4chans board-software is a modified version of the original futaba-script.[10]
With an Alexa-Rank of 391 in Japan and 6421 worldwide[11] the site itself never became overly popular in the western world because of the language barrier.

Something Awful

While Something Awful is not a technical predecessor of 4chan, it might well be it’s cultural ancestor. Created by Richard “Lowtax” Kyanka in 1999, at first as more of a personal site dedicated to lowbrow humor, satirical reviews of pop culture and comments on the dumber corners of the web, it eventually became a flourishing community with nearly 160.000 registered users in its forum[12] and many editors that contribute to series like “The Weekend Web”[13]. While the main page became somewhat of a very special comedy site, its

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Url: http://www.wired.com/techbiz/people/magazine/16-06/mf_hiroyuki
8 cf. Cole Stryker: Epic Win for Anonymous. New York 2011, p.130 et seq.
9 Everything Shii Knows: Futaba Channel. as of Dec.16 2011
Url: http://shii.org/knows/Futaba_Channel
10 4chan: FAQ. Software. as of Dec.16.2011
Url: http://www.4chan.org/faq#software
11 Alexa: Site Info of 2chan.net. as of Dec.16 2011
Url: http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/2chan.net
12 Something Awful: Forum. as of Dec.18.2011
Url: http://forums.somethingawful.com/
13 Something Awful: The Weekend Web. As of Dec.19 2011
Url: http://www.somethingawful.com/d/weekend-web/

forums nowadays make up over 75% of the websites hits.[14]

One of the websites customs is image manipulation.
An example for this is a series called “Photoshop Phriday”, in which users collectively manipulate images to a given topic every friday.[15]
This culture of participation and dark humor made it a unique community and one of the most important early meme factorys.
The forums users are known as goons.
Urban dictionary sarcasticly says this about the Something Awful Users:

> *“Members of the Something Awful Forums. They were named this after repeated verbal attacks on a website caused the owner to complain to Something Awful owner Lowtax about him and his “goons.”*
>
> *Goons have neckbeards, no real-life social skills, a tendency for whining about dumb superficial crap, and a knack for shutting down anyone who has anything worth making fun of. They’re known for their sarcastic and elitist tendencies, though many on the internet find them hilarious.*
>
> *Usually proud members of such Forums as GBS, BYOB, FYAD, or ADTRW, goons patrol the Awful Forums attempting to type funny jokes while their fingers slip off the keyboard due to Cheetos grease.*
>
> *Goons spew overused catchphrases like “Do you have stairs in your house?” or “All your base are belong to us,” though they are also responsible for founding and popularizing various internet memes, web sites, and trends.*

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14 Alexa: somethingawful.com. As of 19.Dec 2011
Url: http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/somethingawful.com

15 Something Awful: Photoshop Phriday. as of Dec.19 2011
Url: http://www.somethingawful.com/d/photoshop-phriday/

There are many varieties of goon, depending on the particular forums they frequent at SA. GBS goons are often sarcastic and clever, while FYAD goons are elitist and abstract, BYOB goons are laid-back and random, CC goons are artistic and very critical, and ADTRW goons are anime-obsessed."[16]

The abbreviation SA in this quote is of course Something Awful, whereas GBS, BYOB, FYAD, CC and ADTRW are sections of the Something Awful Forums. While you can't clearly point out what BYOB and FYAD stands for, (I've read that FYAD stands for "Fuck You And Die"[17] but it never states something official on the site) CC means "Creative Convention" and is a forum about arts, GBS means "General Bullshit", and ADTRW is the "Anime Death Tentacle Rape Whorehouse" which deals with anime topics.

Christopher Poole was also an active member in the Something Awful Forums, especially in the ADTRW, in whichs IRC-channel he announced his plans to start 4chan in 2003[18]

4chan's history

4chan was launched on Oct.1 2003[19] as an unofficial sister site to 2chan.net.[20] It's founder, Chris Poole, better known as "moot" was 15 years old when he started 4chan.[21]
Chris Poole was a big fan of the japanese site 2chan.net, where he, not understanding japanese language, could only look at the pictures.
Nevertheless 2chan or Futaba was popular amongst ADTRW-goons for its focus on otaku culture. At some point, 2chan blocked non-japanese IP-Adresses

16 Urban Dictionary: goon. as of Dec.19 2011
Url: http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=goon&defid=2580035
17 Something Awful Forums: SAclopaedia on FYAD. as of Dec.20 2011
Url: http://forums.somethingawful.com/dictionary.php?act=3&topicid=24
18 Jonathan's Reference Pages: 4chan history. as of Dec.20 2011
Url: http://www.jonnydigital.com/4chan-history
19 4chan News - WELCOME by moot. as of Dec.14 2011
Url: http://www.4chan.org/news?all#2
20 Ibid.
21 Jamin Brophy-Warren: Modest Web Site Is Behind a Bevy of Memes. as of Dec.14 2011
Url: http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121564928060441097.html

from posting to the site.[22]
Maybe this is what sparked the idea of opening an english version of the site. This website would be called 4chan, because it's "TWO TIMES THE CHAN MOTHERFUCK" as moot stated in the ADTRWs IRC-channel[23].

Christopher "moot" Poole registered the URL 4chan.net and most of its first users were in fact the goons from Something Awfuls ADTRW and FYAD[24] bringing parts of goon culture over to 4chan.net.

This included the mentioned lowbrow humor, image manipulation culture, early memes like image macros and the elitist community mentality of keeping newbies out by using in-jokes and a specific language which has to be learned, before one gets accepted.

After problems with domainowner GoDaddy in February 2004 [25], moot lost the domain 4chan.net and registered 4chan.org.
Over time, 4chan grew and today it has 53 independent boards (not including the secret ones). However if a newspaper is writing about 4chan, it is almost always writing about its "random" board, /b/, which was the first board implemented [26] and got 30% of the websites traffic according to an interview with moot from 2009 [27].

Culture

4chans culture is somewhat unique on the english-speaking web.
Its most important /b/-board and its anonymous users have been titled an

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22 Jonathan's Reference Pages: 4chan history. as of Dec.20 2011
Url: http://www.jonnydigital.com/4chan-history

23 Ibid.

24 Encyclopaedia Dramatica - Something Awful. as of Dec.20 2011
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Something_Awful#FYAD

25 Everything Shii knows: 4chan. as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://shii.org/knows/4chan

26 Wikichan: The Complete History of 4chan (cached version) as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://www.peeep.us/85e62424

27 Rex Sorgatz: Macroanonymous Is The New Microfamous. as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://fimoculous.com/archive/post-5738.cfm

internet hate machine [28], hackers on steroids [29], an ocean of piss [30], a paradise for trolls (german: das Trollparadies [31]), a meme factory [32], the asshole of the internet [33], niggertits[34] and countless other names. It is definitely not a safe-for-work website and you should not post there until you've read along for long enough to understand the culture. Otherwise, its critical community will just call you a "newfag" (or "newcandy-ass" as fag is currently wordfiltered to candy-ass as I'm writing this) or "the cancer that is killing /b/".

However, in my opinion, this place is of high cultural value.
As /b/ is the board, that has influenced the web the most, I will concentrate my work on this board, when I'm talking about 4chan.
Sorry /v/, /a/, /sci/, /r9k/ and all the other great boards!

How it works

The sites design hasn't changed much since it was created in 2003 and can be somewhat confusing to someone, who is new to the place.
Unlike on other forums, everything else than the first page is mostly irrelevant. You don't scroll to the bottom of the boards first page and continue to read on the second page. The board has so many users, that you can just refresh the first page and get served with different threads.

Everyone can just create a thread or reply to one without having to register a username. The only requirement is, that new threads have to be accomplished

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28 Fox11 News: Report on anonymous. as of Dec.4 2012
http://youtu.be/DNO6G4ApJQY

29 Ibid.

30 Encyclopedia Dramatica: /b/. as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/B/

31 Gerald Himmelein: »Das Trollparadies«, in: ct, 6/2008, p. 98

32 Jana Herwig: Moot on 4chan and why it works as a meme factory. as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://digiom.wordpress.com/2010/04/06/moot-on-4chan-and-why-it-works-as-a-meme-factory/

33 Nick Douglas: What The Hell Are 4chan, ED, Something Awful, And "b"? as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://gawker.com/346385/what-the-hell-are-4chan-ed-something-awful-and-b

34 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Niggertits. as of Dec.4 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/index.php?title=Niggertits&redirect=no

by an image, since 4chan is an imageboard. On replys however adding an image to your post is optional.

If posting under your pseudonym is important to you, it is possible to enter a username and a password, which will then generate a so called tripcode, identifying you when posting.
However, posting under pseudonyms rather than the default anonymous-posting will propably lead to you being called a namefag by the community, since identity or even pseudonymity is mostly not seen as a good thing on 4chan. This function is often used to identify as the OP, the original poster who started the thread.

If you leave the fields for username password and email empty, you will post as anonymous, just as a vast majority of the users on 4chan do.[35]
When you're starting a thread, it would be a good idea to put "noko" in your email-field. This redirects you to your newly created thread or reply. Otherwise your thread could move away from the first page in the time your browser needs to load it and you will often never see him again.

New threads appear on top of the first page.
Each of the 15 pages contains 15 threads, that are displayed together with its three last responses. You have to click on reply to view the whole thread.

Every time a thread gets created or an existing thread gets an answer, it moves to the top of the first page, moving all other threads down.
If a thread reaches the bottom of the last page, (15 at the time of this writing) it gets automatically deleted without backups.
The average time a thread stays on the first page varies strongly by the daytime, but generally the median time a thread spends on the first page is just 5 seconds.[36]

This "survival of the fittest" under threads ensures, that only the best content stays on the first page as it constantly get replys.
Nevertheless, even the best threads have to die, since all threads have a lim-

35 cf. Michael S. Bernstein et al.: 4chan and /b/: An Analysis of Anonymity and Ephemerality in a Large Online Community. as of Jan.4 2012 Url: http://people.csail.mit.edu/msbernst/papers/4chan-icwsm2011.pdf

36 Ibid.

ited number of images that may be posted or replys it can get.
When the imagelimit is reached, the users can still post text-only replys in which they sometimes post a link to a new thread where the discussion continues. Alternatively they can attempt to archive a very good thread on external sites, which I will explain later when it comes to ephemerality.

Memes

Most people visiting the site for the first time will not only find the design of the site confusing. 4chan and especially /b/ are one of the internets most creative breeding grounds for so called memes.
Memes are ideas or just in-jokes, that spread virally over the internet (and sometimes even into real life).

The term itself is coined by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in his book "The Selfish Gene":

> *"Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. If a scientist hears, or reads about, a good idea, he passes it on to his colleagues and students. He mentions it in his articles and his lectures. If the idea catches on, it can be said to propagate itself, spreading from brain to brain. As my colleague N. K. Humphrey neatly summed up an earlier draft of this chapter:'... memes should be regarded as living structures, not just metaphorically but technically. When you plant a fertile meme in my mind you literally parasitize my brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme's propagation in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell."* [37]

Dawkins idea of memes, and especially the term itself leaked into popular culture and became a meme itself. For Dawknis, knowledge about manufacturing

37 Richard Dawkins: The Selfish Gene. New York 2006, p. 193

tools, the concept of religion or the thought of life after death were memes [38] but in internet culture it stands for in jokes that spread around the internet until everybody knows them and they die.
In his book “Epic Win for Anonymous”, Cole Stryker states that memes are not pictures, videos or microcelebrities but concepts:

> *“People use the word meme to describe visual content like videos or photos or offbeat microcelebrities, but it’s important to recognize that the meme is the concept. A photo or video might be just one execution of that concept among many. As memes evolve, they branch out in countless ways, shifting and merging with other mashed-up, mutated memes. Sometimes, in order to understand a given iteration of a meme, one must also be familiar with dozens of others.”* [39]

It is really important, that a meme is not the funny picture your friend sends you over facebook, but the idea behind it. This way, memes get remixed and mashed-up with other memes all the time and the thought evolves from mind to mind like a biological gene.

Cole Stryker also describes the stages in the life of a meme.[40]
Tough he also points out that they don’t work for every meme, they are still a nice model and that’s why I summed it up here.

Birth
Some kind of content is created and uploaded to the internet.

Discovery
At some point that may be years later, someone will discover the content and posts the content, for example, to 4chan with a comment like “WTF”.
If it is succesful, the thread explodes and mashups will be made. Eventually the meme will jump to other threads.

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38 Ibid.
39 Cole Stryker: Epic Win for Anonymous. New York 2011, p.28
40 Ibid. p. 205 et seq.

Aggregation
At some time, the memewave jumps over to one of the content aggregators. Reddit for example. If it is good, it will be upvoted by the community and eventually appears on the front page, where many see it.

Word of Mouth
Once it has been on the front page of a content aggregator, people will start tweeting and blogging about it or posting in on facebook. That is also the point where sites like 9gag start using the meme.

Blog Pickup
If a meme seems to be established, sites like knowyourmeme will research the phenomenon. A race over the most valuable background informations starts to cover as much of the story as possible before the meme explodes into mainstream. This is also the point where the icanhascheezburger-network propably dedicates a blog to it.

Mainstream Exposure
When a certain level of virality is reached, mainstream media will start to report on it. This is the point when memetic microcelebrities start to get interviewed. Since memes are some kind of in-jokes, they will soon loose their appeal as everyone knows them.

Commercialisation
At this point, microcelebrities from memes get hired for tv-commercials. Advertisers jump on the meme to promote products.

Death
The meme is over, as every bit of fascination is drained by inimaginative rehashes and abundand mainstream coverage.

One exception is, for example, zombo.com [41].
It is a single serving site with a repetitive flash animation, welcoming you to zombo.com. The site has been created by Josh Levine in 1999[42] and has

41 Zombo.com. as of Jan.5 2012
Url: http://www.zombo.com/

42 Whois: zombo.com. as of Jan.5 2012
Url: http://who.is/whois/zombo.com/

never exploded into the mainstream. It has never died, yet never took off to be so famous that everybody knows it.

An example where the rules applied is rickrolling.
Rickrolling is, when you get a link to seemingly very interesting content ("Dude check out the new trailer for gta4") sent to you by a friend. But when you click it, it doesn't lead you to the promised trailer, but to the music video of Rick Astleys 1987 hit song "Never Gonna Give You Up".

One of the earliest known "Never Gonna Give You Up" videos was uploaded to YouTube on May 15th, 2007.

Meanwhile on 4chan, duckrolling was a meme. Duckrolling originated from a wordfilter on 4chans /v/ (videogames) board. The word "Egg" was changed to "Duck". Someday someone posted the word "Eggroll" and got it wordfiltered to "Duckroll". Soon another member of the board created an image with a duck on wheels.

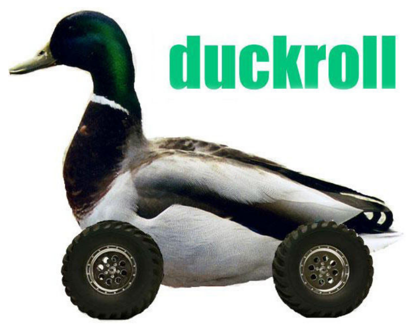


fig. 1: Duckroll [43]

It then continued as some kind of bait-and-switch game, where one would post a promising link to an external site which then didn't lead to the promised content but to an image of a duck on rolls.
This was called duckrolling. It really went to the next level, as someone started linking to Rick Astleys music video on youtube instead of the duck image. Soon, people started rickrolling their friends over twitter, facebook, email and of course over ICQ, MSN and various other messengers.

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43 knowyourmeme: Duckroll. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/duckroll

As 4chan declared war on scientology, they used the song on their demos to rickroll their enemies.[44] This was about the time when it spread into the mainstream. Newspapers reported on the phenomenon and on April Fools' Day 2008, youtube linked every featured video on the front page to a rickroll. [45] Later that year, anonymous even manipulated the MTV Video Music Awards, so that Rick Astley won the price for "Best Act Ever" [46].

By this point the meme could be considered dead in its present form. Various other variations followed, like Trololo [47] (Eduard Khils interpretation of "I Am Glad, Cause I'm Finally Returning Back Home"), the BarackRoll [48] [49] , the Macroll [50], the Kiproll [51], the Batroll [52] and many more. The meme itself was not the video of Rick Astleys "Never gonna give you up", it was the idea to trick people into watching it. Like this, it was easy to evolve the meme by replacing Astleys video with others.
However, none of these videos was as successful as the original rickroll.

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44 Sean Michaels: Taking the Rick. as of Jan.5 2012
Url: http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2008/mar/19/news

45 Michael Arrington: YouTube RickRolls Users. as of Jan.7 2012
Url: http://techcrunch.com/2008/03/31/youtube-rickrolls-users/

46 Matthew Moore: Rick Astley named Best Act Ever. as of Jan.5 2012
Url: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/3395589/Rickrolling-Rick-Astley-named-Best-Act-Ever-at-the-MTV-Europe-Music-Awards.html

47 Youtube: Mr. Trololo original upload. as of Jan.7 2012
Url: http://youtu.be/oavMtUWDBTM

48 Youtube: BarackRoll. as of Jan.7 2012
Url: http://youtu.be/wzSVOcgKq04

49 Youtube: John McCain Gets Rick Rolled by Obama. as of Jan.7 2012
Url: http://youtu.be/HioPyCID6RI?t=28s

50 Youtube: McRoll'd. as of Jan7. 2012
Url: http://youtu.be/Ssh71hePR8Q

51 Youtube: Mudkip: The Insane Edition. as of Jan.7 2012
Url: http://youtu.be/MKzqP4-0Z6M

52 Youtube: Batroll'd. as of Jan.7 2012
Url: http://youtu.be/XCspzg9-bAg

Anonymity

Over 90% of 4chans users choose to post as anonymous.[53]

Anonymity and Pseudonymity were a standard in early web, which is dispersing now, as companies like Google and Facebook live from the personal data of its users. This changed the web.

Therefore I want to introduce you to two kinds of anonymity.

Vertical and Horizontal anonymity.

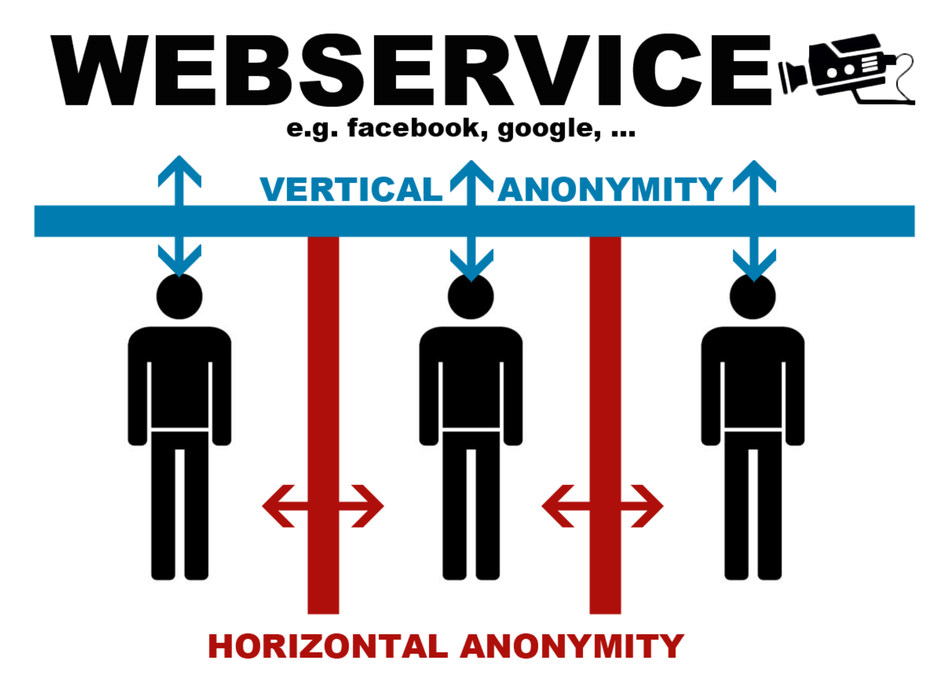


fig. 2: vertical and horizontal anonymity

Facebook allows its users to change privacy options so, that only close friends or nobody at all can see ones status updates. This is often the kind of privacy people find important. I call it horizontal anonymity, since it is anonymity between users. The other kind of anonymity is more important, altough not many people recognize it as this. I call it vertical anonymity, because it is between the users and the system.

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53 cf. Michael S. Bernstein et al.: 4chan and /b/: An Analysis of Anonymity and Ephemerality in a Large Online Community. as of Jan.4 2012 Url: http://people.csail.mit.edu/msbernst/papers/4chan-icwsm2011.pdf

Altough facebook, for example, lets its users set up a wide variety of privacy settings, they only affect horizontal and not vertical anonymity.
If you set your privacy settings so strict, that nobody else than you can read your status updates, facebook still knows of them and there is no way to prevent facebook from knowing it.
4chan doesn't only offer horizontal, but also a lot of vertical anonymity.
The admins of the site will give an ip-adress to the legal authorities if, for example, someone posts child porn.
However the site feels horizontal and vertical anonymous because even the admins of the site don't know more about you, than your ip-adress.
With your identity unassociated from your real-life person, you are completely free to experiment online.
Sherry Turkle points out, that anonymity provides ample room for individuals to express unexplored parts of themselves. [54]

Another good thing about anonymity is, that hierarchys can't establish. Since there are no signs of status or prestige in an anonymous posting, posts themselves will be judged by their content and not by whom it was written.

In my opinion, both vertical and horizontal anonymity are needed for culture as 4chans random board /b/. Other than that, ephemerality is important.

Ephemerality

In real life, the human brain protects us from neverending embarassment.
If we do something really stupid, we might find ourselfes target for the others laughter. Even if what we did was horribly stupid, people will eventually forget after enough time has passed (that is, of course, unless your failure is so epic, that it will go down in written human history).
The Internet is different. By default, everything stored is availible forever, until the data gets deleted or lost during a hard drive crash, for example.
Facebook, for example, doesn't take this into account.
With the new timeline feature, that was introduced as I am writing this, a persons complete history is displayed for people to look after every single thing one did on facebook. It even encourages you to share real-life events in a cur-

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54 Sherry Turkle: Life on the screen. New York 1997, p.185

riculum vitae style, so that it is not only a browsable résumé about everything you did on facebook, but about your whole life.
This, and the fact, that facebooks creator Mark Zuckerberg thinks, that multiple identities are a sign for a lack of integrity[55] adds up to a strange uncanny feeling when posting on websites like facebook.

Popular Websites have different feels of ephemerality and anonymity with facebook as one extreme and 4chan as the other. Before I'll figure out the role of ephemerality on 4chan, I'd like to discuss this issue by means of different online services.

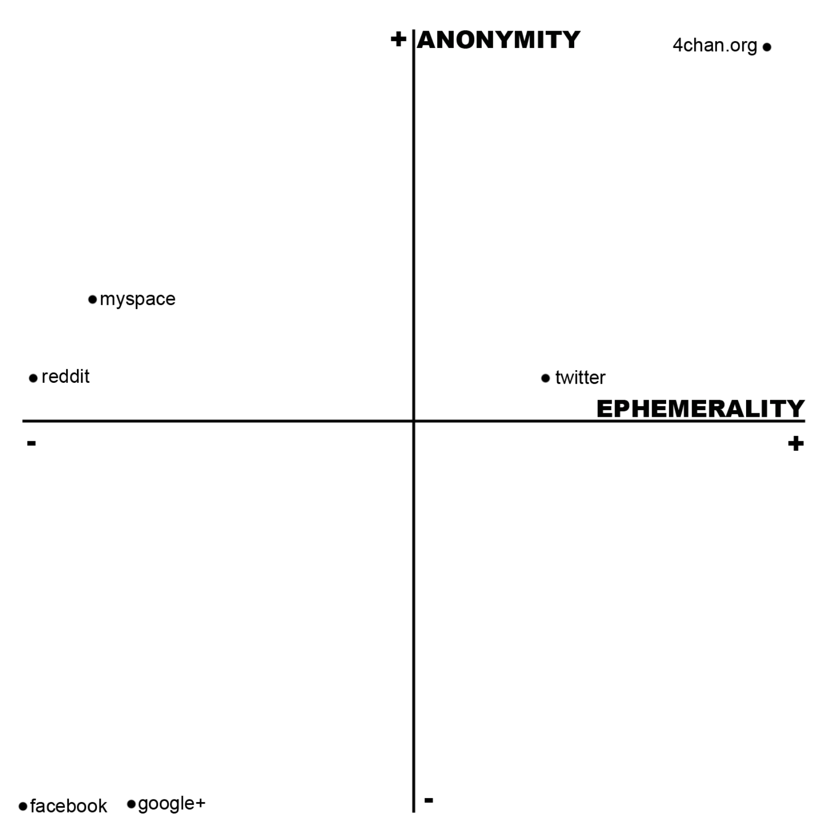


fig. 3: different communities approach to anonymity and ephemerality

55 cf. David Kirkpatrick: the facebook effect. New York 2010, p.199

Facebook and Google+
We already discussed facebook's approach on ephemerality and anonymity. Google's own social network Google+ doesn't differ much from that. Both companies live from the personal data of its users. Therefore, it is mandatory to use his real name, rather than a pseudonym or even posting anonymous. While technically pseudonymity is possible on those networks, both punish it with account deletion. This is because they have an interest in building a big database with reliable information on which they can deliver custom advertisements. Google has, in addition, an immense database of its users. But since the most google services allow for pseudonymity, they can't connect the collected data to real-life identities[56]. That is why you register Google+ with your existing Google-Account. Regarding ephemerality, they slightly differ. While Facebook sets new standards against it with its timeline feature, Google+ doesn't offer old posts on the silver plate. Nevertheless, it allows users to browse old content simply by scrolling down on the wall.
The good thing about this is, that people usually think before posting. Everything you post on Facebook is propably visible to your friends, parents, coworkers, grandparents, students and there might be a chance, that your own children will see it in 15 years. By these decisions, your actions are closely linked to your person.

Myspace
While also a social network, it doesn't force real-life identities.
Everyone is free to choose a pseudonym and a picture of an unicorn as their profile picture. The effect of this is a whole other culture with myspace-style glittergraphics, people that own multiple profiles for different purposes (as a musician, to find like minded people for taboo-topics[57] or just for meeting new people). It's more who you want to be, than who you are.

Twitter
While the site doesn't ask for real-life identities, it is not really anonymous. Pseudonymity is common here. By this, it is possible to connect and build a reputation while not being forced to connect that reputation to your person. The fast paced action and complex connections of replys, who can become

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56 Harry Mccracken: Google+'s Real-Name Policy. as of Jan.1 2012
Url: http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,2094409,00.html

57 Myspace: BDSM Iran. as of Jan.1 2012
Url: http://www.myspace.com/bdsm-iran

difficult to read when looked at later, give the page an ephemeral feel, altough it is saving old tweets. This all leads to a culture, where on the one side businesses and experts of all kind do marketing for themselves under their realnames, while on the other side people use it to chat under pseudonyms or to distribute news.

Reddit

This service puts a strong focus on building a reputation under your pseudonym. Posting there is not anonymous, since your posts are connected to your pseudonym, but real life identities are not common. To ensure high quality content despite the abandonment of real identities, the site uses a karma-feature. Posts and comments on the community can and will be up- or downvoted. Only the best storys and comments will be displayed on top of the page. Users are encouraged to think about what they do, as everything is judged by the other users and posts are saved, visible for everybody on ones profile page.

4chan

The median thread at 4chans /b/ has a lifespan of 3.9 minutes[58] before it gets deleted. Some unpopular threads may even reach the bottom of page 15 and get deleted in 28 seconds[59]. In a study conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Southampton[60] they found out, that over the whole evaluation period, the longest living thread existed for 6.2 hours. Other boards than /b/ may not be that fast-paced, but still, everything will get deleted sooner or later.

4chans users have basically found two ways to cope with this ephemerality. The first way is to vote the thread into an online-archive like http://chanarchive.org. Everybody can propose threads to archive, and when a certain number of archieval request for one thread is reached, it will be mirrored and availible on the archive.

The other way of overcoming the ephemerality is to save the best images on

58 cf. Michael S. Bernstein et al.: 4chan and /b/: An Analysis of Anonymity and Ephemerality in a Large Online Community. as of Jan.4 2012 Url: http://people.csail.mit.edu/msbernst/papers/4chan-icwsm2011.pdf

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

your hard-drive. Many users have /b/ folders[61] [62] [63] on their computers, in which the best content gets saved in form of images, texts or screenshots of epic threads. In days where online archives weren't so common and the chan-culture didn't leak into the mainstream or got documented by encyclopaedia dramatica and know your meme, keeping a local /b/ folder was quite important for users and still can be a kind of a status symbol.

Another interesting thing is, that 4chan gives its users the tools to affect this ephemerality. Every thread has an image- and a postlimit. When this limit is reached, the thread will sooner or later die, as it gets displaced by other threads. Every time you comment on a thread, it goes to the top of page 1 and from there travels downwards as other threads are created or receive replys. A technique for keeping threads alive is called "bumping". Here, a user will comment an interesting thread without adding real content to the discussion, just to bump it back to the first page, usually with the word "bump".[64]
On the other hand, writing "sage" into the email field will push the thread one post towards the post-limit without bumping it to the first page. This is commonly used to display discontent with a thread. Sage is derived from the japanese word sageru, which means "to lower".[65]

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61 chanarchive.org: You're on trial for murder. The 12th picture in your /b/ folder is the prosecution's main evidence against you. as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://chanarchive.org/4chan/b/22863

62 chanarchive.org: The strange world of /b/: Comment. as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://chanarchive.org/4chan/b/3041#73804526

63 cf. Michael S. Bernstein et al.: 4chan and /b/: An Analysis of Anonymity and Ephemerality in a Large Online Community. as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://people.csail.mit.edu/msbernst/papers/4chan-icwsm2011.pdf

64 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Bump. as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Bump

65 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Sage. as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Sage

The research paper of scholars of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and University of Southampton also pointed out, that ephemerality is in fact a motivator to create content.

> *“One may think users would see no point to contributing if their actions will be removed within minutes. However, if /b/ users want to keep a thread from expiring within minutes, they need to keep conversation active. This ‘bump’ practice, combined with a norm of quick replies, may encourage community members to contribute content. This hypothesis was derived from our observations, and will need to be tested more rigorously.”*[66]

Language as a symbol of status

Usually, the good thing about anonymous posting is, that content will be judged by itself and not by the reputation of the author. Therefore everyone could contribute freely to a conversation without facing personal prejudice. There should be no hierarchys. Somehow, 4chans users have managed to establish mechanisms to display status and credibility.
Newbies, or newfags in chanspeak, are said to be “the cancer that is killing /b/” [67]. This elitary society has developed a very complex language and codex, peppered with in-jokes and memes. Failure to conform to this codex leads to disrespect or even hate from the community.
To make successful posts on 4chan, you first have to lurk the forum for up to several years to learn this language, the memes and be able to follow the code of conduct. Not many actually do this, and that’s why the oldfags (the opposite of newbies in chanspeak) don’t like it when the site is getting media coverage. They’d like to keep the environment as hostile to newbies as possible to enforce their own status, or as encyclopedia dramatica puts it:

> *“In the end though ‘The cancer that is killing /b/’ is just another way for oldfags to exert themselves above others with a false sense of superiority. As if being part of /b/ longer makes you any more or less of a dickhead*

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66 Michael S. Bernstein et al.: 4chan and /b/: An Analysis of Anonymity and Ephemerality in a Large Online Community. as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://people.csail.mit.edu/msbernst/papers/4chan-icwsm2011.pdf

67 Encyclopedia Dramatica: The cancer that is killing /b/. as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Newfag

than anyone else. When your only form of social interaction is an image board, it’s not surprising that you might create your own ridiculous and irrelevant social hierarchy in order to boost your own sense of self-importance, and then claim that others are ruining it to further solidify your non-existent status.” [68]

Oldfags are also sometimes seen as the cancer that is killing /b/ for their elitism.You could think of them as Statler and Waldorf from the muppets.



fig. 4: Statler and Waldorf [69]

68 Encyclopedia Dramatica: The cancer that is killing /b/. Bottom Line. as of Jan.4 2012 Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Oldfags#Bottom_Line

69 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Newfag. as of Jan.22 2012 Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Newfag

One example of this culture is, that not liking chocolate milk can get you banned:

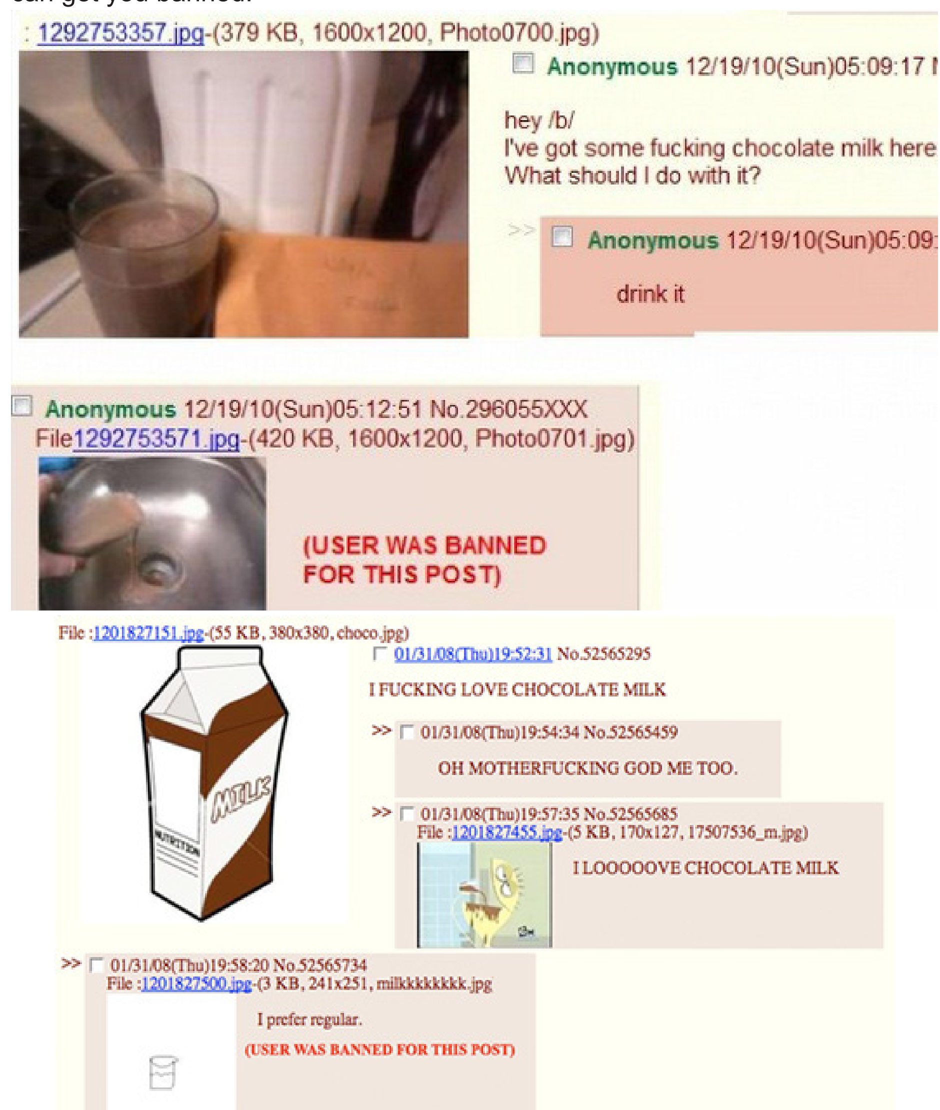


fig 5[70] & 6[71]: Chocolate Milk

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70 Reddit: 4chan takes their chocolate milk very seriously. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://www.reddit.com/r/funny/comments/m08w1/4chan_takes_their_chocolate_milk_seriously/

71 Imgur: Chocolate Milk. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://i.imgur.com/SLzYC.jpg

Another technique to demask newfags is, or was, triforcing.
The triforce is a symbol from the popular video game series “The Legend of Zelda” [72] and should look like this:

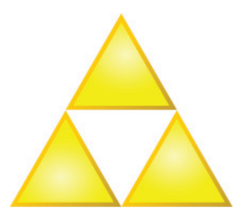


fig. 7: triforce [73]

Members of 4chan have rebuilt this triforce with a series of unicode commands. If it is done right, it comes out like this:



This is commonly accompanied by the prompt “newfags can’t triforce”.
Regular space-characters will be removed automatically, which is why a copypasted Triforce, altough it looks correct in the comment field, after being submitted looks like this:

▲
▲ ▲

Triforcing can be seen as an index, a signal whose presentation is only possible by someone with particular skill or knowledge.[74]

However, as this sort of failure became a meme itself, not only newfags falling for the bait produce incorrect triforces. [75]
This is just an example of a way to expose newbies. Other forms include “newfags can’t greentext”, “newfags can’t blank post” or “newfags can’t uʍop ǝpısdn ǝdʎʇ” [76]

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72 Wikipedia: Universe of The Legend of Zelda. as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universe_of_The_Legend_of_Zelda#Triforce

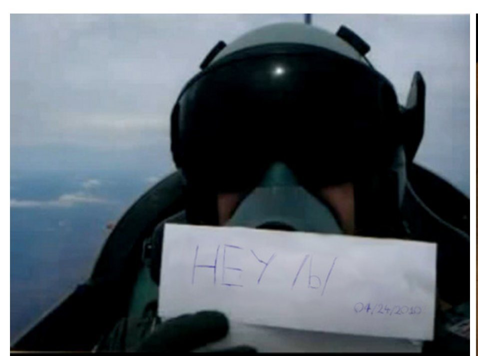
73 Wikipedia: Triforce. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Triforce.svg

74 Michael S. Bernstein et al.: 4chan and /b/: An Analysis of Anonymity and Ephemerality in a Large Online Community. as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://people.csail.mit.edu/msbernst/papers/4chan-icwsm2011.pdf

75 chanarchive.org: Triforce. as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://chanarchive.org/4chan/b/14519/triforce

76 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Triforce. as of Jan.4 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Triforce

Then, there is yet another technique to overcome the limitations of anonymity. Timestamping. This is used to get credibility on posts. Think of a guy bragging about his drug collection on 4chan. He could upload a photo of it, but then nobody would think the photo is legit. After all it is really easy to pull images of google. To prove the images authenticity, the original poster has to write the date and a reference to the site it is posted on (e.g. “sup /b/”) on a piece of paper which will be placed in front on the thing he wants to show. [77] Another technique is writing the time and date with a reference on ones body. This is mainly common for so called “camwhores”, people who post (often porno-graphic) pictures of themselves on the internet.



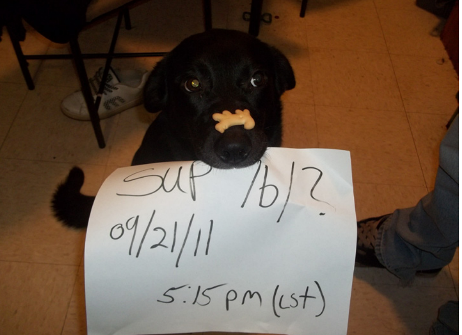


fig. 8 & 9: timestamps. Source: 4chan

77 chanarchive.org: Doing balancing tricks with my dog. as of Dec.4 2012
Url: http://chanarchive.org/4chan/b/21610/

Further Reading

If you are interestet in 4chan and anonymous or the actions of the hacktivist group Anonymous, I strongly recommend you to read the book “Epic Win for Anonymous” by Cole Stryker. The only thing I have to criticise is, that he uses to talk about bored teenagers when he talks about 4chans users. While for some, or even most this may be true, there is no proof for such a claim and I am pretty sure, that all kinds of people browse 4chan. Maybe sometimes they just act a bit like bored teenagers as an effect of the Internet Inhibition Effect (I’ll talk about that in the next chapter).

Furthermore, I recommend you to read the research paper by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and University of Southampton with the title “4chan and /b/: An Analysis of Anonymity and Ephemerality in a Large Online Community”. It’s availible online for free at:
http://projects.csail.mit.edu/chanthropology/

Trolls

Definition

As I did research, I came across various definitions of trolling, but I felt, that most of them are inaccurate. The definition cited on wikipedia is from 1999. Judith Donath has written a good essay about it called “Identity and Deception” These are two parts, where she describes trolling, the first part is however a quote she uses, which is initially written by a user of the usenet-group soc.couples.wedding in 1995.

> *“Are you familiar with fishing? Trolling is where you set your fishing lines in the water and then slowly go back and forth dragging the bait and hoping for a bite. Trolling on the Net is the same concept - someone baits a post and then waits for the bite on the line and then enjoys the ensuing fight.”* [78]

> *“Trolling is a game about identity deception, albeit one that is played without the consent of most players. The troll attempts to pass as a legitimate participant, sharing the group’s common interests and concerns; the newsgroups members, if they are cognizant of trolls and other identity deceptions, attempt to both distinguish real from trolling postings, and upon judging a poster a troll, make the offending poster leave the group. Their success at the former depends on how well they – and the troll – understand identity cues; their success at the latter depends on whether the troll’s enjoyment is sufficiently diminished or outweighed by the costs imposed by the group. Trolls can be costly in several ways. A troll can disrupt the discussion on a newsgroup, disseminate bad advice, and damage the feeling of trust in the newsgroup community. Furthermore, in a group that has become sensitized to trolling – where the rate of deception is high – many honestly naïve questions may be quickly rejected as trollings. This can be quite off-putting to the new user who upon venturing a first posting is immediately bombarded with angry accusations. Even if the accusation is unfounded, being branded a troll is quite damaging to one’s online reputation.”* [79]

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78 Judith Donath: »Identity and Deception«, in: Marc A. Smith, Peter Kollock (ed..): Communities in Cyberspace. London 1999, p. 45

2 Ibid.

In my opinion, this definition is more a description than a definition, because it focuses too much on the usenet environment. It would also propably include fraud, which is not trolling.

Cole Stryker has his own definition for trolling:

> *"Trolling is the act of agitating or fooling people for fun under false pretenses."* [80]

This definition is short and elegant, works most of the times, but is not flawless. Think of a guy trolling a vegan forum, by saying that eating meat is awesome and he really likes it. Strong reactions are likely to happen, but this didn't happen under false pretenses, if the guy really likes meat.

Another example, where this definition would not fit is Operation Slickpubes.[81] A guy covered himself in petroleum jelly and pubic hair and ran into a Scientology building, smearing as much of the petroleum jelly and pubes on church property as possible. Since he was covered in vaseline, the security staff couldn't grab him, so he managed to escape. The whole action was filmed and put on youtube, with "The Ballad of Agent Pubeit" sung to the pictures. Altough, this was also politically motivated as a part of Project Chanology, the comedic part in it is so strong, that it classifies as trolling. Classifying Project Chanology as trolling is also in accord with Julian Dibbells Article "The Assclown Offensive".[82] However, altough I can't look into Agent Pubeits head, I can hardly imagine him just pretending his disapproval for Scientology. This case was especially important, because he propably didn't do it for his own amusement only, but for the amusement of a whole community, who watched it on YouTube, while he got arrested. [83]

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80 Cole Stryker: Epic Win for Anonymous. New York 2011, p.94

81 Youtube: Anonymous member covered in pubes runs into scientology building. as of Jan.8 2012
Url: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrZk0C91mfg

82 Julian Dibbell: The Assclown Offensive: How to Enrage the Church of Scientology. as of Jan.8 2012
Url: http://www.wired.com/culture/culturereviews/magazine/17-10/mf_chanology

83 NY Daily News: Greasy vandal in hate crime vs. Scientology. as of Jan.8 2012
Url: http://www.nydailynews.com/news/greasy-vandal-hate-crime-scientology-article-1.423223

I discussed these definitions with the users of the Something Awful Debate & Discussion Forum and got great input that really helped me, so I will try to put up my own definition for trolling here:

Trolling is the act of disrupting people for personal amusement or the amusement of many.

I'd also like to explain a term, I will use from time to time in this text:
Lulz. The term "lulz" originated on Encyclopedia Dramatica and became a standard term in chan-culture. It is a corruption of the internet acronym "lol" which means laughing out loud. However, lulz is not synonym with lol. A more suitable synonym would be entertainment, sometimes at the expense of someone else. Lulz is therefore near to the concept of schadenfreude.
An example for lulz would be Nelson from the Simpsons, when he is pointing at someone, yelling his famous line "Ha Ha".

Another, more comedic, explanation of Trolling is "John Gabriels Greater Internet Fuckwad Theory" (GIFT) by Penny Arcade authors Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins, published in march of 2004.[84]

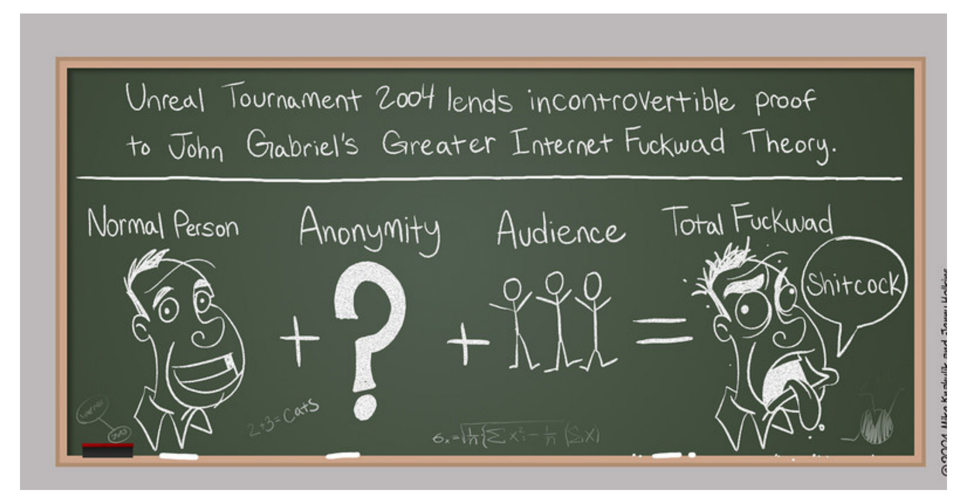


fig. 10: John Gabriels Greater Internet Fuckwad Theory [85]

84 Penny Arcade: John Gabriels Greater Internet Fuckwad Theory. as of Jan.8 2012 Url: http://www.penny-arcade.com/comic/2004/3/19/

85 Ibid.

Penny Arcade is a webcomic focused on video games and video game culture, written by Jerry Holkins and illustrated by Mike Krahulik.

The theory is based on the assumption, that a normal person being able to act anonymous while having an audience will likely act like a total fuckwad.

In an Article about rude comments on YouTube, published on advocate.com, Clay Shirky is cited saying:

> *"'It's called John Gabriel's Greater Internet Fuckwad Theory,' says Clay Shirky, a journalist and New York University adjunct professor who studies the social and economic effects of Internet technologies. The theory is based on this simple equation: Normal Person + Audience + Anonymity = Fuckwad.*
>
> *'There's a large crowd,' says Shirky, 'and you can act out in front of it without paying any personal price to your reputation,' which creates conditions most likely to draw out the typical Internet user's worst impulses."* [86]

In June 2004, an essay of John Suler got published in CyberPsychology & Behavior entitled "The Online Disinhibition Effect" [87], where he figured out different core concepts, that have an influence on behaviour on the Internet.

The core concept of the online disinhibition effect relies on a loosening of social restrictions and inhibitions that would otherwise be present in normal face-to-face interaction during interactions with others on the Internet. [88]

This leads to positive and negative effects, or benign and toxic disinhibition. The factors that lead to disinhibition are:

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86 Will Doig: Homophobosphere. as of Jan.8 2012
Url: http://www.advocate.com/article.aspx?id=22197

87 John Suler: »The Online Disinhibition Effect«, in: CyberPsychology & Behavior, Vol. 7, No. 3 (June 2004), pp321-326

88 cf. Wikipedia: Online disinhibition effect. as of Jan.8 2012
Url: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Online_disinhibition_effect

Dissociative anonymity: Anonymity disconnects the doings from the identity.

Invisibility: This one overlaps with anonymity, in that it removes identity cues. One can't be physically seen on the Internet, therefore, the need to concern oneself with appearance and tone of voice is dramatically lowered and sometimes absent.[89]

Asynchronity: Because of the asynchronous conversations on the Internet, it's easier to just throw out an opinion and leave (and sometimes never come back). In this way the poster can achieve catharsis by "voicing" his feelings, even if the audience is invisible.

Solipsistic Introjection: Without visual face-to-face cues, the human mind will assign characteristics and traits to an online interlocutor, according to our own desires, needs and wishes. Those traits differ from what the interlocutor actually has in person. The user constructs a made up persona for his interlocutor in a role playing style to reinforce the "reality" of the person he is communicating with.

Dissociative Imagination: People may see online interactions as a kind of game in which they just log off whenever they whish. Thus they are able to dissociate their online persona from the offline reality.

Minimizing Authority: A lack of identity cues often leads to a lack of hierarchy or social position. Authority, that would prevent someone from saying something offline, may be abscent online.

These six factors add up to the online disinhibition effect, which can lead to benign and toxic results. In the context of this writing it is an interesting theory for antisocial behavior on the internet.

Another interesting point of view, when discussing trolling, are the theories of Carl Gustav Jung.

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89 Ibid.

In Jungian theory, every human has a persona and a shadow.
The persona is how we present ourselfes to the outside world, how we would like to be perceived. The shadow-archetype[90] stands for dark subconscious desires, that are also part of our character, but which we don't like to display to the outside world. Confronting yourself with your shadow-archetype is helpful and the key to self-actualisation. Not confronting the shadow-archetype results in projection. The act of projecting your darkest subconscious desires into another person is not really good for a peaceful society. For example, one could imagine a woman who feels sexually harassed by a coworker, who is in fact not doing anything at all. Still the woman fells harassed. The Jungian answer to that paradox would be, that the woman itself has a subconscious sexual desire for the coworker hidden in the shadow-archetype. Since she doesn't confront it, she projects this desire into her coworker and feels like he is the one desiring her. Maybe, the anonymity of the internet brings out the shadow-archetype.
This could mean, that trolling is a way of confronting yourself with the shadow-archetype to achieve self-actualisation. Viewed like this, trolling can be a gain of some point to our society.

Jung also believed, that the shadow is the seat of creativity.[91] This would explain, why 4chan is such an enourmous meme-machine.

However, since I'm not a psychologist, I will stop to write about it at this point. Nevertheless, I'd be really glad to see interdisciplinary research on this topic happen.

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90 Wikipedia: Shadow (psychology). as of Jan.9 2012
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shadow_%28psychology%29

91 Carolyn Kaufman: The Dark and Light Sides of the Shadow. as of Jan.9 2012
Url: http://archetypewriting.com/articles/articles_ck/archetypes2_shadow.htm

History

It is hard to find out, when and where exactly trolling was mentioned first in this context. Searching the Usenet for the first appearance is further hindered by the fact, that (unrelated) troll dolls [92] were popular at the time, where the word trolling is thought to be mentioned first.
As Mattathias Schwartz says, it propably happened in the late 1980s.[93]
Previous to appearing on the Internet, it appeared as a military term in "trolling for MiGs" [94] where it meant pulling enemy MiG and SAM fire away from dive bombers by sending fighter jets into hostile airspace.

The quote from an 1995 Usenet group, that Judith Donath gives, suggests that it derived from the fishing term "trolling".
For trolling as a fishing technique, wikipedia gives this definition:

> *"Trolling is a method of fishing where one or more fishing lines, baited with lures or bait fish, are drawn through the water. This may be behind a moving boat, or by slowly winding the line in when fishing from a static position, or even sweeping the line from side-to-side, e.g. when fishing from a jetty."*[95]

Another use for the word trolling from the pre-internet era is in gay slang.

> *"troll v. wander about looking for sex."* [96]

The noun "Troll" comes from Norse mythology and Scandinavian folklore, where it describes a supernatural creature that dwells in isolated rocks,

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92 Wikipedia: Troll Doll. as of Jan.8 2012
Url: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Troll_doll

93 Mattathias Schwartz: The Trolls Among Us. as of Jan.8 2012
Url: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/03/magazine/03trolls-t.html

94 John Saar: »Air Carrier War«, in: LIFE, 4. Febr. 1972, p.28
Url: http://books.google.com/books?id=EkAEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA28

95 Wikipedia: Trolling (fishing). as of Jan.8 2012
Url: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trolling_%28fishing%29

96 Ken Cage: Gayle. a history and dictionary of gay language in south africa. Houghton 2003, p.100
Url: http://books.google.com/books?id=WSn7026sq_cC&pg=PA100&dq=gay+troll+sex&sig=lZCrvPfm9hktgJ5XzoovSU6Z_3w

mountains, or caves, lives together in small family units, and is rarely helpful to human beings.[97]
In Norwegian fairy-tale "Three Billy Goats Gruff", a greedy troll is waiting under a bridge for his victims.[98]
The earliest mention of the word Troll that is associated with Internet Trolling I've seen was on alt.flame by a user called Troll.

> "*Just some credentials: I am called Troll. I didn't get the name because I'm a fun guy. I am the the champion of channel +insult on irc and I have thrice defended the title before the channel went down, so I can flame with the best. Flame away if you like, but 'I'm gonna deal it back to you in spades. 'Cause when I'm havin' fun ya know I can't conceal it. Because I know you'd never cut it in my game.' -Guns N' Roses"* [99]

That quote dates back to Mid 1992 and gives no clue, where his name comes from. However the fact that he is using it as a noun could induce, that he indeed linked it to the mythological creature.

In a discussion from September 1993 on alt.urban.folklore however, it is clearly linked to the fishing term and used as a noun. Phil Gustavson wrote this:

> *"I agree that it's unproductive and rude to jump on naive new posters and gloat about it, especially when there are so many deserving veterans around.*
>
> *Trolling can be fun, if it's reasonably subtle. Honest trolls usually even have a more or less concealed message saying "This is a Troll" to the imaginative reader. But asking a question straight out and abusing anyone kind enough to post a straight answer just makes the group look cliquish and inbred.*

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97 Wikipedia: Trolls. as of Jan.8 2012
Url: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Troll

98 Wikipedia: Three Billy Goats Gruff". as of Jan.8 2012
Url: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Billy_Goats_Gruff

99 alt.flame: Hi boyz and girlz. as of Jan.8 2012
Url: http://groups.google.com/group/alt.flame/browse_thread/thread/2ae03150685f403a/472da61199f426b1

Fishing allowed, but artificial flies with barbless hooks only.” [100]

The next poster, Richard Joltes, dates the first appearance back to somewhen in 1992:

> *“I can’t recall exactly when trolling became popular on AFU (I think it was about 1 - 1.5 years ago) but at that point it was largely a response to the huge number of totally clueless folks who’d never read the FAQ or lurked on the group, but just jumped in and started babbling, thus making the signal-to-noise ratio even worse than usual...if that’s possible. These days it’s really getting out of hand, and I’m just as guilty as anyone else of indulging on occasion.”*[101]

The already mentioned quote from Judith Donaths text dates back to 1995 and even explained it with the fishining analogy:

> *“Are you familiar with fishing? Trolling is where you set your fishing lines in the water and then slowly go back and forth dragging the bait and hoping for a bite. Trolling on the Net is the same concept - someone baits a post and then waits for the bite on the line and then enjoys the ensuing fight.”* [102]

My guess is, that both the norse supernatural creature and the fishing technique have influenced the word. While it could have been “fishing for newbies”, Trolls were soon imagined as ugly angry people and so the analogy to the Nordic creature grew common.

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100 alt.urban.folklore: Death to Trolling. as of Jan.8 2012
Url: http://groups.google.com/group/alt.folklore.urban/browse_thread/thread/cd29352f5cb19116/16e2d7b5e327a44b?#16e2d7b5e327a44b

101 Ibid.

102 Judith Donath: »Identity and Deception«, in: Marc A. Smith, Peter Kollock (ed.): Communities in Cyberspace. London 1999, p. 45

Apart from that, the prase “Do not feed the trolls!” became a common on the internet. Sadly it is again difficult to pinpoint the first appearance. Here are some ASCII-Graphics, that could be found in usenet groups:

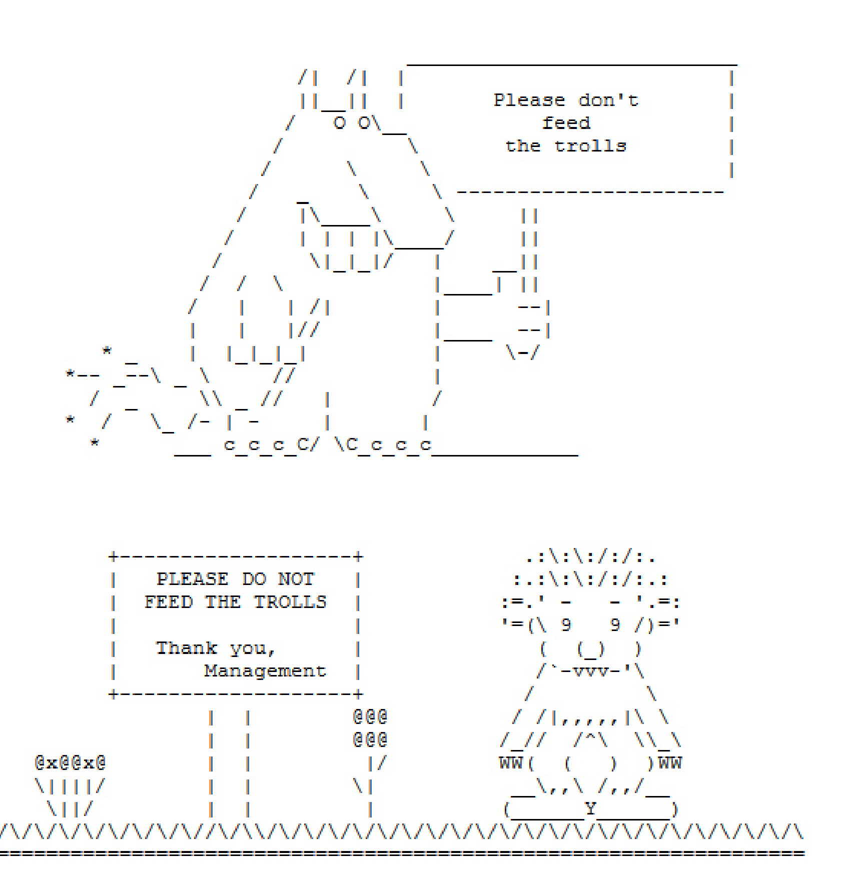


fig 11: ASCII Graphics of Trolls from the collection of Janne Nikula [103]

103 Janne Nikula: Do not feed the trolls. as of Jan.8 2012
Url: http://jni.sdf-eu.org/trolls.html

The Troll in the second graphic also has some resemblance with the troll dolls that were popular at that time:



fig 12: Troll Doll [104]

As a conclusion to this chapter I would say, that the verb “to troll” originates from the fishing technique, whereas the noun “Troll” originates from the norse supernatural creature. Both seem to have developed simultaneously and the words “Troll” and “trolling” became a meme. Today, people understand the word without the analogy to either the creature or the fishing term.

104 Fanpop.com: Troll Doll. as of Jan.8 2012
Url: http://www.fanpop.com/spots/troll-dolls/images/1353646/title/troll-doll-photo

Famous Trolls

Altough the term “trolling” was coined in the late 1980s there were of course trolls before the internet. Here are some examples:

Socrates (469 BC - 399 BC)
The ancient Greek forum was a place were people came together and discussed. Therefore it is an ancient equivalent of todays internet-forums.
Since trolls are common these days, it is most likely, that there were trolls of some sort back in ancient Greece. One of them was so good, that his name is well known until today: Socrates.
Being one of the grandfathers of modern philosophy, he used an interesting technique to create wisdom.
When people had discussions, he joined in and pretended to be in the role of the student knowing nothing. This lead to his interlocutor taking the role of the teacher. This teacher would then talk about his insights and what he knows. As time passes, Socrates started asking questions, slowly showing, that all the time he was the teacher. By his question, he proved his interlocutor wrong, and made them think about what they really know.[105]

The saying “I know one thing, that I know nothing” is commonly attributed to him, altough it is misinterpreted and its original meaning is more in the direction of

> *“This man, on one hand, believes that he knows something, while not knowing [anything]. On the other hand, I – equally ignorant – do not believe [that I know anything].”*[106]

Furthermore he said:

> *“So now I do not know what virtue is; perhaps you knew before you contacted me, but now you are certainly like one who does not know.”*[107]

105 Peter Kunzmann et al.: dtv-Atlas Philosophie. Munich 2009, p.37
106 Wikipedia: I know that I know nothing. as of Jan.8 2012
Url: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_know_that_I_know_nothing
107 Ibid.

Socrates was not claiming, that he knew nothing. The saying described his technique of proving other people wrong without teaching them better.
At the end of the discussion, the outcome mostly was that someone who thought to know something, just got teached by Socrates that he was wrong and now had to rethink everythink. This was called Elenctic Method. [108]
Socrates primary goal was to make people think about what they think to know. Everything should be questioned.[109] Since it is hard to say if he also did it for his own amusement, classifying him as a troll according to the definition above is risky.

Still Sokrates is worth to be mentioned, as he is seen as the first troll by many. [110]

Diogenes of Sinope (about 400BC - 323BC)

Diogenes of Sinope was a Cynic Philosopher. The school of thought of the cynics criticised the values and goals of society and religion. They criticised these issues with a provoking livestyle. Their goal in life was happiness through inner independence and autarky. Three main things stood in the way of achieving this luck. Angst, nescience and desire for goods.
According to the Cynics beliefs, the way of achieving inner freedom lied in frugality, bodily and mental asceticism. [111]

In the case of Diogenes of Sinope, the consequences were pretty impressive. He was banned from the city of Sinope, after he defaced currency.
After that, he came to live in a barrel in Athens to challenge established customs and values. It is said, that he posessed no clothes.
He smashed his wooden bowl, one of the few things he posessed, as he saw a boy drinking from his bare hands.

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108 »Elenktik«, article in: Peter Prechtl and Franz-Peter Burkard (ed.): Metzler Lexikon Philosophie. Begriffe und Definitionen. Stuttgart 2008, p.131

109 Wikipedia: Socratic Method. as of Jan.8 2012 Url: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socratic_method

110 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Socrates. as of Jan.8 2012 Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Socrates

111 »Kyniker«, article in: Peter Prechtl and Franz-Peter Burkard (ed.): Metzler Lexikon Philosophie. Begriffe und Definitionen. Stuttgart 2008, p.131

When Plato gave Socrates' definition of man as "featherless bipeds", Diogenes plucked a chicken and brought it into Platos academy, saying: "Behold! I've brought you a man."
He also strolled along the marketplace with a lit lamp at daytime, saying he is looking for an honest man.
His most important anecdote is however the encounter with Alexander the Great. He wanted to meet the great philosopher and asked Diogenes, if there is any favor he could do for him. Diogenes replied: "Yes, stand out of my sunlight" after which Alexander declared, "If I were not Alexander,
then I should wish to be Diogenes."
Plato described Diogenes as "a Socrates gone mad."

Diogenes was also known for masturbating in public, eating at the marketplace, which was considered rude at the time, urinating on people who insulted him, pointing at people with his middle finger and defecating at the theatre. [112]

This would qualify him for an excellent troll, if he didn't do it to teach society about values. It is really hard to say, if his personal amusement played a role in his doings. On the other hand, I believe it to be quite possible, that he had a lot of fun when he was urinating on critics.
His goals were inner freedom as the key to happiness. If his doings were to pursue that ideal, that implicates he really did it for teh lulz (for his enjoyment). This would qualify him as one of the first documented trolls.

Ralph Pootawn

Trolling Second Life isn't a very hard thing to do, but few managed to be so famous as Ralph Pootawn is.

What is Second Life? I'll just take the explanation of http://www.ralphplsgo.com, the site dedicated to document Ralph Pootawns doings:

> *"The 'game' Second Life is a virtual world made by Linden Lab that launched on June 23, 2003 and is accessible with an Internet connection.*

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112 Wikipedia: Diogenes of Sinope. as of Jan.8 2012 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diogenes_of_Sinope

A free client program called the Second Life Viewer enables its users, called Residents, to interact with each other through avatars. Residents can explore, meet other residents, socialize, participate in individual and group activities, and create and trade virtual property and services with one another, or travel throughout the world (which residents refer to as 'the grid'). Second Life is for people and trolls aged 18 and over."[113]

Ralph Pootawn is a green, trollish (the norse mythology kind) looking guy with a beer can in its hand and a pipe in his mouth, who is systematically breaking the communities unwritten rules. Entering someones virtual houses is considered to be rude, like in "First Life". In the picture that started his fame, Ralph was standing right next to a couple engaging in virtual intercourse, watching. As the man said "ralph pls go" he simply answered "no". This became a meme on 4chan, and altough there were many more actions, this recurring pattern, where he invades someones privacy and after being asked to leave just says no, became his signature move.



fig. 13: Ralph Pootawn: The picture that started it [114]

113 ralphplsgo.com: What is Second Life?.as of Jan.11 2012
Url: http://www.ralphplsgo.com/second-life-ralph-pootawn.htm

114 chanarchive.org: Picture from original thread on /v/. as of Jan.11 2012
http://chanarchive.org/4chan/v/4972/ralph-pls-go

It didn't take long for 4chans /v/ board to create spinoffs with ralph photo-shopped into all kinds of pictures.



fig. 14 & 15: Variations of the meme [115] [116]

Beside these mashups, there are many more pictures of Ralphs actions.



fig. 16: another action of Ralph Pootawn [117]

115 chanarchive.org: Pokemon Ralph.as of Jan.11 2012
Url: http://chanarchive.org/4chan/b/4964/ralph-pootwan-oc

116 chanarchive.org: Aerith dies Ralph watches. as of Jan.11 2012
http://chanarchive.org/4chan/v/4972/ralph-pls-go

117 chanarchive.org: More Ralph Trolling. as of Jan.11 2012
Url: http://chanarchive.org/4chan/b/4959/more-ralph-trolling

Patriotic Nigras

As described above, Second Life is full of possibilities for trolls.
The Patriotic Nigras are an organisation of trolls or, more precise, griefers. Their signature are similarily styled avatars. In detail, their avatars have dark skin, are tall, wear a suit and an afro-haircut.



fig. 17: logo of the Patriotic Nigras [118]

4chans /b/ and /v/ boards, again, are the initiators of the organisation and the characteristic avatars are an hommage to a previous raid on the browsergame Habbo Hotel. In this infamous Habbo Hotel Raid, users of 4chan arranged that they all created similar avatars and blocked doors, or especially the pool, saying that the “Pool’s closed due to AIDS”.





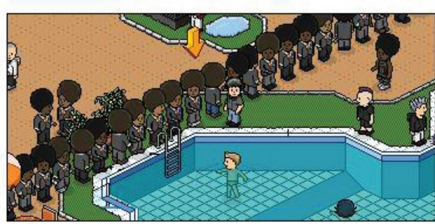


fig. 18: Picture documenting the Raid of Habbo Hotel [119]

118 Wikipedia: Patriotic Nigras Logo. as of Jan.12 2012
Url: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:PN_Website_Logo.png

119 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Priceless. as of Jan.12 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/File:PRICELESS.jpg

Pool’s Closed achieved meme status [120] and another result of the action was, that creating an afro-american avatar with suit could get you banned right away in Habbo Hotel. [121]

In 2007 they defaced the Second Life headquarter of politician John Edwards.[122]
They also received coverage for an action during an interview with Second Life enterpreneur Anshe Chung (username).[123] Mrs. Chung claimed to have raised over 1 million dollars worth of in-game property and got invited to an interview that should be livestreamed to CNET.[124] During the interview however, the room got flooded with phalluses. Another technique includes abusive use of the games script-engine. Thousands of crates are spawned and drop airborne onto the citizens of an area, which then are either forced to log off, or see their character doing things they propably don’t like, like yelling Arnold Schwarzenegger’s catchphrase “Get to the choppaaaaaaa!”

This technique is stunningly similar to what Julian Dibbell described in his essay “A Rape in Cyberspace”.[125] Back then, the word griefer didn’t exist, so it was called Rape in Cyberspace.
This story took place in a Multi User Dungeon, Object Oriented,
or short MOO.[126]
They were somehow like a combination of a chatroom and a text-rpg.
So these MOOs, or more specifically it’s the Lambda MOO the story is about, were Second Lifes forefathers and grieving was quite similar to what groups like the Patriotic Nigras are doing today. In the essay, a user called Mr. Bungle

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120 knowyourmeme.com: Pool’s Closed. as of Jan.12 2012
http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/pools-closed
121 Encyclopedia Dramatica: The Great Habbo Raid of 2006. as of Jan.12 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/The_Great_Habbo_Raid_of_July_2006#The_Aftermath
122 John Brownlee: John Edwards Meets Second Life ‘Feces Spewing Obscenity’. as of Jan.12 2012
Url: http://www.wired.com/table_of_malcontents/2007/03/john_edwards_me/
123 Wikipedia: Patriotic Nigras. as of Jan.12 2012
Url: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriotic_nigras
124 Julian Dibbell: Mutilated Furries, Flying Phalluses. as of Jan.12 2012
Url: http://www.wired.com/gaming/virtualworlds/magazine/16-02/mf_goons
125 Julian Dibbell: my tiny life. London 1999, pp.11-30
126 Ibid. p.14

used a subprogramm called “Vodoodoll” to control other players. He used this to make them commit sexual actions to their self against their will.
To add more humiliation to it, he made his victims do it in the living room, the most crowded public place of Lambda MOO. Dibbells narrator philosophises about a connection between the mind and the identity the user took on while playing, stating that *“when it comes to sex, perhaps the body in question is not the physical one at all, but its psychic double, the bodylike self-representation we carry around in our heads - and that wether we present that body to another as a meat puppet or a word puppet is not nearly as significant a distinction as one might have thought.”* [127]
He goes on and states that *“what happens inside a MUD-made world is neither exactly real nor exactly make-believe, but nonetheless profoundly, compellingly, and emotionally true.”* [128]
I find it quite interesting, how the same author writes an article for Wired about that topic nearly 10 years later and points out, that

> *“‘the Internet is serious business’ means exactly the opposite of what it says. It encodes two truths held as self-evident by Goons and /b/tards alike — that nothing on the Internet is so serious it can’t be laughed at, and that nothing is so laughable as people who think otherwise.”*

He then closes the article with these words:

> *“In the end, no matter what they say, life on the Internet really is a serious business. It matters. But the tricky thing is that it matters above all because it mostly doesn’t — because it conjures bits of serious human connection from an oceanic flow of words, pictures, videoclips, and other weightless shadows of what’s real. The challenge is sorting out the consequential from the not-so-much. And, if Rich Kyanka’s steely equanimity is any example, the antics of the Goons and /b/tards might actually sharpen our ability to make that distinction. To those who think the griefers’ handiwork is simply inexcusable: Well, being inexcusable is, after all, the griefers’ job. Ours is to figure out that caring too much only gives them more of the one thing they crave: the lulz.”* [129]

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127 Ibid. p.17

128 Ibid.

129 Julian Dibbell: Mutilated Furries, Flying Phalluses. as of Jan.12 2012
Url: http://www.wired.com/gaming/virtualworlds/magazine/16-02/mf_goons

David Thorne
You propably heard of this girl that posted an invitation to her birthday party on Facebook and forgot to set the invitation page to private.
Everybody could join the party and so did people. The event spread virally on reddit and also on 4chan and soon, over 60.000 people were listed as confirmed guests on the facebook page.[130] The incident sparked media controversy about facebookparties worldwide, while professional internet troll David Thorne started to sell t-shirts for the party. After the facebookpage got shut down, it revealed, that the entire party was the brainchild of mastertroll David Thorne. He successfully manufactured the page in a way, that he even managed to mobilize the anonymous masses from 4chan. The bait was really clever and the fact that he even earned money from it by selling t-shirts adds extra lulz to it.
This is not his only famous action.
On his blog 27b/6 [131] he exhibits his doings.
He especially got attention for his attempt to pay a bill with a drawing of a spider.[132]

David Thorne is the prove that not all trolls are 14year old basement dwellers.

anonymous
The users of 4chan, also known as anonymous, are a collective with somewhat of an hivemind. If they start doing something, results can be so remarkable, that even traditional media outlets report about the event. One example for a successful trolling was “YouTube Porn Day”.

The anonymous horde organized the raid on 4chan, stating that everybody opens several YouTube-accounts, uploads pornographic content and sets it to private, so that it can’t get flagged or moderated. The pornographic content would be entitled and tagged with things like “marblecake” or

130 Robert Quigley: Kate’s Party: Or, How 60,000 Trolls Facebook-Crashed a Random Party in Australia. as of Jan.12 2012
Url: http://www.geekosystem.com/kates-party-facebook-meme/

131 27b/6: Go Away. as of Jan.12 2012
Url: http://www.27bslash6.com

132 27b/6: Next time, I’ll spend the money on drugs instead. as of Jan.12 2012
Url: http://www.27bslash6.com/overdue.html

“Jonas Brothers” - if it had happened later in 2010 that would propably have been “Justin Bieber” - or even Disney-related stuff.



1. Register a new account
use http://10minutemail.com/
2. Upload small videos
use http://askjolene.com
3. Tag them with
marbecake , then <ANYthing you want>
4. Repeat (use proxies)



irc.deltaanime.net #porntube
"Hour 1-2 = nasty shit
hours 3-23 = normal pr0n + nasty shit
hour 23 = upload at own risk"

fig. 19: Instructional poster that was distributed before the raid [133]

The participants of the raid were told to suddenly set all their videos to public at May 20, 2009 00:00:01 GMT.
As a result of this, the site was immediatelly flooded with huge amounts of porn. At some point almost every video on the frontpage was of pornographic nature. To add to the confusion, some participants cut matching stillframes, to the deceptive video title, into the porn before uploading it, so that the preview image of youtube wouldn’t spoil the pornographic content until somebody clicked on it.

As moderators of youtube started to realize what was happening, they were looking directly for videos tagged with “marblecake”, since that was a code-word for anonymous to track their success during the operation. As an answer to that, anonymous changed its tactic and split up into two groups.
The first one continues uploading porn without the tag marblecake or other chan-related tags, while the other group was randomly flagging normal videos on youtube, making the flag-as-inappropriate-mechanism useless for the moderators.

133 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Youporn11.png. as of Jan.13 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/File:Youporn11.png

After that, the American media covered the event and brought statements of various people, including a 12 year old girl, searching for "Jonas Brothers" whose phrase "I'm 12 years old and what is this?"[134] achieved meme-status on the channelsphere.[135]

However, when checking up background information on 4chan raids, keep in mind, that rule 1&2 [136] forbids talking about 4chan and /b/. Therefore, it is common for 4chan users to blame it on the comedy-website ebaumsworld, who is regarded as an enemy of, amongst others, 4chan and anonymous.[137]

Another notable raid of anonymous is the manipulation of the Times poll for the most influential person of 2009. Not only did they vote moot, 4chans creator, as number one, they also arranged the next 20 places so, that their first letters made up the sentence: mARBLECAKE ALSO THE GAME, which are two memes from chan-culture.[138] In the end, moot was acknowledged as a winner by time magazine. [139]

anonymous is perhaps the most notorious group of trolls on the internet at this time. However not all of their actions are that clever. Another one, for example, included posting irritatingly flashing gif-animations on an internet forum for epileptics. [140]

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134 Siobhan Courtney: Pornographic videos flood YouTube. as of Jan.13 2012
Url: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8061979.stm

135 knowyourmeme.com: I'm twelve years old and what is this?. as of Jan.13 2012
Url: http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/im-twelve-years-old-and-what-is-this

136 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Rules of the Internet. as of Jan.13 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Rules_of_the_internet

137 Wikipedia: ebaumsworld. as of Jan.13 2012
Url: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EBaum%27s_World#Copyright_infringement

138 Ryan Singel: How Anonymous Hackers Triumphed Over Time. as of Jan.15 2012
Url: http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2009/04/how-anonymous-hackers-triumphed-over-time/

139 Time Magazine: The World's Most Influential Person Is... . as of Jan.15 2012
Url: http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1894028,00.html

140 Kevin Poulsen: Hackers Assault Epilepsy Patients via Computer. as of Jan.15 2012
Url: http://www.wired.com/politics/security/news/2008/03/epilepsy

Jason Fortuny

His most notable action was the so called Craigslist Experiment.[141]
He set up a fake ad on Seattles Craigslist of a woman searching for a dominant male to have sex with. In 24 hours he received 178 replys including contact data and photos, sometimes even of genitals. In mid 2006, he made these replies public on LiveJournal, from where they spread over to Encyclopedia Dramatica. [142]
This generated a lot of buzz all over the internet and was controversely discussed, even in traditional media.[143]

Dennis "Tracky Birthday" Knopf

Everybody knows, that trolling is a art! Few however receive prizes for their art. Dennis Knopf is one of those few, that actually received an award for trolling YouTubes users.
There are tons of "bootyshaking"-videos on youtube, where mostly young girls dance to reggaeton, dancehall or hiphop music. However, since most of these young girls don't have their own camera guy, they usually put the camera on a table and walk behind it to switch it on, before they walk in front of the lens and start dancing. It usually takes the protagonist about 2 seconds to switch on the camera and walk into the frame. In those two seconds, you see nothing but the dancers room. Dennis Knopf downloaded the videos, left the audio track, but looped these 2 seconds, where the dancer didn't enter the frame yet. By this, he came up with bootyshaking videos minus the bootyshaking. He then reuploaded these videos of empty rooms under the same names, with the same tags. Like this, people searching for young dancing girls, found those videos of empty rooms as related videos when browsing through the regular videos of girls shaking their booty.
Altough this was not only done for entertainment, there is an unmissable comedic component in this artwork.

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141 Anick Jesdanun: Prankster posts sex ad replies online. as of Jan.13 2012
Url: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14791788/#.TxD3Wvl3ruR

142 Encyclopedia Dramatica: RFJason CL Expeiment. as of Jan.16 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/RFJason_CL_Experiment

143 Bill Thompson: When private and public collide. As of Jan.15 2012
Url: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/5335054.stm

Youtube users left comments like:

"'i think somethin missing but i jus dont know wat'
jfoote11

'What a fine ass!!! Can't believe that.....'
droneofkc

'it just seems like somethings lacking....'
gohanks2" [144]

"'what happened 2 the real video? this guy takes all the booty poppin vids, and takes out the best part.'
SSOOOOMOE" [145]

"'ummmmmm....nobody wants to see your dirty dusty ass mattress... WHERE IS THE ASS JIGGLIN'???????'
peachez919page2

'OH HELLL YEAHZ!!
Big ol' ass!!'
mastodon

'Where tha fuck is that bitch at?'
chicityrecordz" [146]

This project got awarded with an award for best online online work at Stuttgart Filmwinter, 2009. [147]

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144 YouTube: POONER AND A.DUBS BOOTYMEAT. as of Jan.13 2012
Url: http://youtu.be/svJuZESEsEw
145 YouTube: poppin booty. as of Jan.13 2012
Url: http://youtu.be/jzeB8cCTiOc
146 YouTube: ASS JiGGLiN FOR D-R0C. [tHiS ONES BEttER]. as of Jan.15 2012
Url: http://youtu.be/rnnIID0wAok
147 Wand 5 e.V.: Preisverleihung 22. Stuttgarter Filmwinter. as of Jan.15 2012
Url: http://www.wand5.de/wand5cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=97&Itemid=107&lang=english

A famous Victim - worst case scenario

Jessi Slaughter

The case of Jessi Slaughter demonstrated, what will happen if you react in the worst possible way to a mass of anonymous trolls.

Before the incident, she was already a microcelebrity on Stickam amongst Internet tween scenesters. To make a long story short, she had haters and replied to them by uploading a video to YouTube. For obvious reasons, the original version of the video is not online anymore.

However, many copies exist.[148]

In this video, 11-year old Jessi Slaughter (not her real name) said things like "[...]I'm happy with my life, okay? And if you can't like realize that and stop hating, you know what, I'll pop a glock in your mouth and make a brain slushie."[149] or "Suck my non-existent penis, okay? Just suck it! Get AIDS and die!"[150]

Prior to that she posted several things similar in tone. However, at some point, 4chans /b/ got hold of the video and started hating on her. They didn't only troll her online, but found out and circulated her real name, adress, phone number and links to all of her other social media profiles. The news quickly spread over to tumblr, where they circulated easily, because of the quick possibility to share and repost things.

From there on, the usual harrasment started. Trolls allegedly sent pizza deliveries and considered sending call girls to her house and bombarded her social network profiles with hateful comments.[151]

Altough, this is trolling, I won't go into details. The acts themselves were uninspired boring cyberbullying and therefore are an example, that trolling often is not funny to anyone else than the trolls themselves. Just when the trolls started to loose interest, a new video was posted by Jessi Slaughter.

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148 YouTube: ORIGINAL Jessi Slaughter before emotional breakdown. as of Jan.12 2012
Url: http://youtu.be/Yy4gGs8_90w

149 Ibid. t=0:23
Url: http://youtu.be/Yy4gGs8_90w?t=23s

150 Ibid. t=3:00
Url: http://youtu.be/Yy4gGs8_90w?t=3m

151 Adrian Chen: How the Internet Beat Up an 11-Year-Old Girl. as of Jan.15 2012
Url: http://gawker.com/5589103/how-the-internet-beat-up-an-11+year+old-girl

This time she had an emotional breakdown while her dad was threatening the trolls with absurd claims, which can be considered the worst thing to do when in such a situation.

In this second video, she is seen crying, saying that her life is ruined and that she hasn't been able to sleep or eat. Meanwhile her father joins in and goes on a rant at the trolls. While this is already a bad thing to do, he displayed his lack of basic understanding of how the internet works by saying things like: "You dun goofed"[152], "You bunch of lying no good punks. And I know who it's coming from because I backtraced it."[153], "You've been reported to the cyberpolice"[154] or "consequences will never be the same"[155].
This, of course, agitated the trolls again.

In the aftermath of this story, Adrian Chen posted an article on Gawker about what happened. One of his statements was:

> *"Don't pick on 11 year-old girls. Seriously. No matter how dumb they seem—no matter how much they might seem to deserve it—they are, at the end of the day, 11 year-old girls. You wouldn't make an 11 year-old girl cry in real life; why do it on the Internet?"* [156]

This is undoubtly correct. However, trolls are simply a part of the internet and Cole Stryker is just as right when he points out that decrying the trolls is sort of like decrying a gang of thugs who mugged a guy wandering dark alleys wearing a suit made of hundred dollar bills.

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152 YouTube: Jessi Slaughter And Her Dad. as of Jan.15 2012
http://youtu.be/esNHjSaEURg?t=41s
153 Ibid. t=1:49
Url: http://youtu.be/esNHjSaEURg?t=1m49s
154 Ibid. t=1:58
Url: http://youtu.be/esNHjSaEURg?t=1m58s
155 Ibid: t=2:21
Url: http://youtu.be/esNHjSaEURg?t=2m21s
156 Adrian Chen: How the Internet Beat Up an 11-Year-Old Girl. as of Jan.15 2012
Url: http://gawker.com/5589103/how-the-internet-beat-up-an-11+year+old-girl

“But at the same time, internet trolling is a constant. If given the opportunity, people will always be awful on the internet. Decrying the trolls is sort of like decrying a gang of thugs who mugged a guy wandering dark alleys wearing a suit made of hundred dollar bills. The girl was posting suggestive photos of herself, threatening people who posted nasty comments about her videos and taunting her bullies. In other words, this girl was inviting it. This doesn’t excuse the harassers, but no one would have come after her if she hadn’t been acting wildly inappropriate for an eleven-year-old girl.

Only eleven and posting nudes and threats online! Which is why the real failure here lies squarely on Mom and Dad’s shoulders. All 11-year-olds are idiots. When given the power of a worldwide platform to exhibit their vanity, they’ll take it. Kids with unfettered internet access need parents who understand how the internet works.” [157]

This case is an example, why parents should know what their kids are doing on the Internet.

157 Cole Stryker: The Jessi Slaughter Scandal. as of Jan.15 2012
Url: http://www.urlesque.com/2010/07/19/jessi-slaughter/

Be a Troll!

How to troll

There are countless ways to troll, so it is really difficult, if not impossible, to come up with a list of what one can do.
Even if I would write a list with trolling techniques, it would very soon be rendered obsolete, as the websites would adapt and victims would not fall for it anymore, as they got aware of the trolls.
Nevertheless I want to analyze the things, that will most likely remain true.
After all, my ideas still are not meant to be executed 1:1.
They are rather an inspiration for future actions.
A successful troll always has to find new creative ways to infiltrate a system.
The success of a troll should be based on how much comedy he creates and by which creative ways he generates the lulz.

Before giving instructions, I would first like to adress some special forms of trolling.

Cyberbullying
If you really don't like that girl from school and decide to post photoshopped pornographic pictures on her Facebook wall, you are likely to embarass yourself more than that girl.

This is not successful trolling, since it is propably only funny for yourself and needs as much of a creative mastermind to come up with, as punching an eleven-year-old girl in the face.
It gets worse, when groups of trolls all target the same person as in the case of Jessi Slaughter. This is different in that many light trolls will add up to a wild mob with pitchforks and torches. While this may be funny for the trolls, usually most bystanders will think of you as insane brainless retards. Trolling people can be done in a beautiful way, but ruining their life should be a border not to be crossed, especially if the victim is a defenseless eleven-year-old.
Trolling individual people can be very interesting however, if the victim is not an eleven-year-old and it doesn't drive the victim to the edge of suicide.

Again, remember Julian Dibbells quote on the phrase “Internet is serious business:

> *“‘the Internet is serious business’ means exactly the opposite of what it says. It encodes two truths held as self-evident by Goons and /b/tards alike — that nothing on the Internet is so serious it can’t be laughed at, and that nothing is so laughable as people who think otherwise.”* [158]

While there is nothing more ridiculous than people who take some certain things on the internet too serious, it is quite normal to care about your real-life. When I’m using the term real-life, please note that it does not neccesarily exclude online activities. Life on the Internet is real too and sometimes it matters, sometimes it don’t. Deciding where to draw the border is one of the most important things when it comes to identity on the Internet. Ruining this real-life and laughing about people taking it serious is, contradictory to mocking people who are taking weird aspects of online life too serious, the lamest variation of trolling.

Griefers are trolls too

The techniques of griefers vary widely. Griefing is trolling in computer-games. While some forms of grieving are really lame, others are beautiful works of art.

One example of a lame griefer would be someone yelling nonsense into ones headset while playing online games with voicechat enabled. The energy the griefer needs to shout all the time is way higher than the energy the victim needs to mute the griefer.

Intentional team-kills in online shooters are a bit more fun if they are timed and executed in a proper manner. Just shooting your whole team down at the spawnpoint will propably result in rage from other players but also in a ban from the server and very few lulz.

Since there are countless games in existence, there are unique possibilities for griefers in each game. Open world multiplayer games however offer the best possibilities for griefers. The Patriotic Nigras, for example, are a very prominent group of second life griefers (see chapter 3).

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158 Julian Dibbell: Mutilated Furries, Flying Phalluses. as of Jan.12 2012
Url: http://www.wired.com/gaming/virtualworlds/magazine/16-02/mf_goons

Another open world multiplayer game is minecraft, which suffers heavily under its griefers. Minecraft is a game where you wander around, collecting resources, to build structures, craft complex items from simpler ones and try to survive the nights in which monsters appear. In its multiplayer mode, people tend to create complex cities.



fig 20: Minecraft

Since the possibilities to troll are endless, I will dedicate the game its own chapter.

General Rules

When trolling, there are in general a few things to consider in order to be successful.

Trustworthy Signals
Inexperienced trolls tend to use exaggerated characters.
If the victims are inexperienced as well, that may work, but if one wants to troll more experienced users, it is extremely important to fake a reasonable identity. Judith Donath writes about this issue in her essay “Identity and Deception” from 1999.

She writes about a theory by Amotz Zahavi, from 1993 which reads, that we have to distinguish two different types of signals: conventional- and assessment signals.[159] The latter are signals, that are sent indirect and therefore more reliable. In terms of semiotics, this would be called an indexical sign.

> *"Big horns on a stag are an assessment signal for strength, for the animal must be quite strong and healthy to support these massive growths. The horns are a signal: potential rivals or mates need not directly test the stag's strength. Assessment signals are reliable, since sending an assessment signal requires that the sender possess the relevant trait."* [160]

Assessment signals are the hardest to fake, but if you manage to do so (think of photoshop), you can get a lot of the needed credibility out of it.

Conventional signals on the other hand are quite easy to fake but less believable. An example for such a sign would be the claim, that I am very stong. There is most likely no way to check the truth behind the signal in an online community and therefore this kind of signal is less valuable.
Also, as Donath puts it, "conventional signals can become unstable: due to excessive deception, a once meaningful signal can become noise." [161]

In conclusion, it can be said, that trustworthy signals are important for a successful troll.

Know your victims
Before you start to troll, you first have to learn about your targets.
Different communities may have grown accustomed to certain types of trolls. A feminist community is likely to know you are a troll, when you just signed up and write things like "Yo bitch go back to kitchen and make me a sammich!". The signal behind this message is, that you are a mysogynist and therefore the arch enemy of feminism. The bad thing is, that everybody would come up with that idea at first thought. The feminist community has likely been trolled by many like this in the past and so that signal became noise.

159 Judith Donath: »Identity and Deception«, in: Marc A. Smith, Peter Kollock (ed.): Communities in Cyberspace. London 1999, p. 32
160 Ibid.
161 Ibid. p. 33

Groups or people that get trolled often are often the hardest to troll since they develop a sense which makes them more aware of trolls.
Learn about the customs of your targets to find strong and reliable signals to use.

Be aware of identity cues

The Internet allows for few identity cues, so be careful about those you display. Think about what your victims can read out of your identity.
This starts with your account-name or your email adress you use to register.
Don't overdo it. When you try to act stupid, don't do too much or you'll be implausible. Language is another important cue you display. Be conscious about it and analyse the language patterns of your victims before you start.
Some are common all over the internet, like WTF, LOL or BRB (what the fuck, laughing out loud, be right back) and others, like chanspeak, zangendeutsch or 1337speak are more like local accents.

Choose your venue

Think about what site or more generally speaking what medium you want to troll. Keep in mind, that all this is not limited to facebook or the internet. Basically, you can troll whereever and whomever you want.

Infiltrate

Now that you know your victims, you can, for example, play with expectations. Every community has these expectations. 4chan displays small thumbnails in the threads. If you click on them they load the big version of the image.
One thing I remember was an image with a text written over it:
"HOW TO TROLL". Only the Headline was readable on the thumbnail, while the rest of the text was just to small to read as a thumbnail. However, it looked as if there were instructions on "how to troll" written in that image file. When you click on it, instead of resizing to a decent size, allowing for the text to be read, the graphic stays in thumbnail size. At that point you realise, that there are no instructions and you have been trolled.

HOW TO TROLL

STEP 1:

STEP 2:

STEP 3:

fig. 21: How to troll [162]

A variation of this would be to place a static image that looks exactly like an embedded youtube video on a website.
The user is tempted to click the play button, just to find out he got trolled.

The technique of breaking interface-promises works in many communities. On the next-generation imageboard canv.as [163], there is, for example, a little “play” symbol in the top right corner of animations. This button is often pasted on top of static images:



fig. 22: troll post on canvas [164]

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162 Encyclopedia Dramatica: How to Troll. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/File:How_to_troll.jpg

163 Michael Arrington: 4chan Founder Unleashes Canvas On The World. as of Jan.17 2012
http://techcrunch.com/2011/01/31/4chan-founder-unleases-canvas-networks/

164 Canvas: FTFY. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://canv.as/p/594as/reply/245257?nav=exploitable

Those techniques are quite mild and just ideas. Overusing them would turn the signal to noise and few would fall for it. One could also try to mimick someone, who is well respected in a community. On 4chan, impersonating moot, the admin, is rather easy. However, it can get you banned and experienced users will not fall for it. Also, infiltrating is not always done on the Internet. Think of an office troll, who makes copies of a paperclip and puts those copies back into the tray.[165] Co-workers trying to copy documents would have the paperclip on them. People would be really confused, because nobody would expect someone to do such a thing.

Cole Stryker writes about the motivation to troll:

> *"Mine is a generation raised by video games, which teach children to test the boundaries of their rule sets, mess with their environments, and memorize entire tiny universes until they're able to spot and exploit holes and glitches. [...] When playing a game the way it's supposed to be played gets boring, they seek out cheat codes and other ways of essentially 'breaking' the game. It's one thing to beat or win a game, but can you say you've truly mastered a game until you've broken it?"* [166]

The perspective to see trolling as a search of exploit holes in a system seems pretty fitting here.
So when trying to troll in a classy way, try to figure out how a system works and then mess around with it, so that something truly unexpected happens.

Troll Tales

Since classy trolling is about creativity and often deceptive usage of signals, it would not be a good idea to give actual instructions on how to troll. Instructions given now would have little to no effect in some years, when certain signals have gotten too noisy. Anyway, I will give a few examples as inspiration for own ideas.

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165 The Art of Trolling: It Must Be Stuck Somewhere. As of Jan.17 2012 http://artoftrolling.memebase.com/2011/10/26/irl-troll-it-must-be-stuck-somewhere/

166 Cole Stryker: Epic Win for Anonymous. New York 2011, p.104

Forum Trolling

When trolling in a forum, there is mostly one problem you will face: your postcount.

If your first post on any forum will be somehow strange, people will immediatelly think that you are a troll that just signed up to troll the forum.

Therefore you either have to build up a reputation first, which is pretty time consuming and only suitable when your idea to troll the forum is truly epic, or you start off with a reasonable background story and without insane claims. Registering on a queer internet forum, writing "God hates fags! You are disgusting!" in your first post will just get you banned. The fact, that you came there to cause trouble is so evident, that you won't even offend an unexperienced user. After all there is the question why you registered an account on a queer forum if you are against gays.

A more subtle and therefore successful forum troll would maybe sign up at a conspiracy and mystery forum to tell the other members of your creepy campfire story. Just write something along the lines of "Hey, this is my first post and I've heard about this story some months ago and didn't find anything about it online. So I came here to ask if someone of you knows something about it. This is a legitimate reason to sign up on such a forum and it is also not unusual, that the search for answers brings newbies to such forums. Therefore people will not assume you are a troll in the first place. When telling your story, be sure to keep it believable in the first posts. As the thread gets momentum, you can come out with more and more crazy details.

Offline Trolling

Trolling doesn't always have to happen on the Internet. If your Internet connection is not working, you might aswell get outside and troll people without using a computer. You just need an idea. Possibilities are countless.

Maybe you could manipulate signs to corrupt their message:



fig. 23: bathroom troll. image source unknown.

Offline trolling is especially beautiful, because most trolls are online-only. Therefore signals that have become unreliable on the internet may be still considered reliable offline.
Also, the more open a system is, that is the more possibilities to act exist in it, the more possibilities exist for finding new ways to troll.
One thing I remember doing myself when I was younger, was going into my brothers room to turn all his furniture upside down while he was at school. Another great idea would be to set an alarm clock to 4 A.M. and hide it somewhere in the victims bedroom. Another idea would be making candy apples with onions instead of apples.[167]

Trolling Polls

Polls can be a very good target to troll, but usually you will need support.
If you are familiar with 4chans culture and the poll looks promising to troll, chances are they will do it. However it is important to know, that /b/ is noones

167 Art of Trolling: The Real Reason I Don't Take These From Strangers. as of Jan.17 2012 Url: http://artoftrolling.memebase.com/2011/11/02/irl-troll-the-real-reason-i-dont-take-these-from-strangers/

personal army and requests that disregard that rule often backfire.
The best example for a successful raid on a poll was Time's vote vor the most influential Person of 2009 on which I wrote in chapter three.
Another exaple would be the vote for the 2008 MTV European Music Awards. anonymous voted Rick Astley as the best act ever with about 100 million votes.[168] 4chan users even started using scripts[169] and someone programmed an autovoter to achieve one of the greatest RickRolls.[170]
While such huge actions are rare, smaller polls can be easier to raid.
Just use your common sense when judging if there is a potential for lulz in an online poll, before you try to get the channelsphere to raid it.


Reader response

Today's question: Would you troll the Alligator's poll questions?

Wednesday's question: Would you help a child dying on the side of the road?

19% YES
81% NO
632 TOTAL VOTES

Vote or post a message at www.alligator.org

Elizabeth Behrman
EDITOR

Joey Flechas
MANAGING EDITOR

Justin Hayes
OPINIONS EDITOR

the independent florida
alligator

fig. 24: Alligator's poll trolled [171]

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168 Matthew Moore: Rick Astley named Best Act Ever at the MTV Europe Music Awards. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/3395589/Rickrolling-Rick-Astley-named-Best-Act-Ever-at-the-MTV-Europe-Music-Awards.html

169 Wikidot: Vote Rick. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://bestactever.wikidot.com/

170 Tony Austin: WinRickVoter. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://www.flickr.com/photos/tonyaustin/2951935994/

171 Alligator: Would you troll the Alligator's poll? as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://www.alligator.org/opinion/questions/poll_254393b6-fae3-11e0-bfe4-001cc4c03286.html

Trolling Chats

Regular online chatrooms are not as popular now as they were in the days before Web2.0 but it is still very promising to troll them. Unlike on forums, you are not branded as a newbie or potential troll by your low post-count or recent signup date. While the regular trolling (as in trolling forums) works fine here, some special forms of chat trolling are possible.

In practically every chatroom, there are lots of males looking for chatsex. They are pretty easy to troll by pretending to be a woman, for example, just to reveal later on, that you are a man. One of the best known chattrolls was bloodninja. He mostly trolled on AIM (AOL Internet Messenger) and his victims were mainly girls looking for chatsex.[172]

In the beginning he started out playing along, just to drift into absurdity while the conversation proceeded. This is one example of a bloodninja chatlog:

> *"Bloodninja : Ok baby, we got to hurry, I don't know how long I can keep it ready for you.*
> *j_gurli13 : thats ok. ok i'm a japanese schoolgirl, what r u.*
> *Bloodninja : A Rhinocerus. Well, hung like one, thats for sure.*
> *j_gurli13 : haha, ok lets go.*
> *j_gurli13 : i put my hand through ur hair, and kiss u on the neck.*
> *Bloodninja : I stomp the ground, and snort, to alert you that you are in my breeding territory.*
> *j_gurli13 : haha, ok, u know that turns me on.*
> *j_gurli13 : i start unbuttoning ur shirt.*
> *Bloodninja : Rhinoceruses don't wear shirts.*
> *j_gurli13 : No, ur not really a Rhinocerus silly, it's just part of the game.*
> *Bloodninja : Rhinoceruses don't play games.*
> *They fucking charge your ass.*
> *j_gurli13 : stop, cmon be serious.*
> *Bloodninja : It doesn't get any more serious than a Rhinocerus about to charge your ass.*
> *Bloodninja : I stomp my feet, the dust stirs around my tough skinned feet.*
> *j_gurli13 : thats it.*

172 Encyclopedia Dramatica: bloodninja. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Bloodninja/logs

Bloodninja : Nostrils flaring, I lower my head. My horn, like some phallic symbol of my potent virility, is the last thing you see :as skulls collide and mine remains the victor. You are now a bloody red ragdoll suspended in the air on my mighty horn.
Bloodninja : Fuck am I hard now." [173]

Controversy arose when the staff of the website fugly.com claimed to be behind the bloodninja chatlogs. Since bloodninjas true identity has remained unknown to this day, it is hard to prove or deny these claims.[174]
Omegle is different than other chatrooms, in that it randomly connects two conversational partners to a private 1on1 chatroom. The catchphrase of the site is "talk to strangers". However most of the people there are either trolls or males looking for chatsex. One particular way to troll them is to impersonate a 14 year old girl. When the chat partner wants to engage in chatsex despite the age, you can play along for a few lines and then claim to be from an organisation hunting for pedophiles. This is an example of such an encounter:

"You're now chatting with a random stranger. Say hi!
You: hey
Stranger: asl
You: 14 f us
You: u?
Stranger: 20 male us :p
You: add me myspace? :p
Stranger: sure
Stranger: Show me your titties pl0x? :D
You: idk
Stranger: c'mon
You: lol i guess kk
Stranger: link?
You: Hello, I am an agent from Perverted Justice investigating adults engaging sex with underage children on Omegle. Within a minute we will have the chat log and your IP address. We will arrest you in two days.

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173 Encyclopedia Dramatica: bloodninja logs. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Bloodninja/logs
174 Fugly: The Legend Of Bloodninja. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://www.fugly.com/victims/bloodninja.php

Your conversational partner has disconnected." [175]

Another new form of chat has emerged recently: videochats. Chatroulette is a website, where two random chatpartners get connected via webcam and textchat simultaneously. Like on Omegle, many of the participants are men looking for chatsex with women.
Few people on chatroultette know, that a webcam video is not necessarily authentic. Prerecorded videos, still pictures or even YouTube videos can be displayed as the webcam image. Therefore it is easy to just take a YouTube video of an attractive female looking in a webcam as your webcam image for chatroulette. This way, some men will do a lot if you promise them to expose your breasts afterwards. In particular it has become a meme to make people put a shoe on their head. If this is accomplished, the troll will make a screen-shot and leave or reveal their true grinning webcam image.

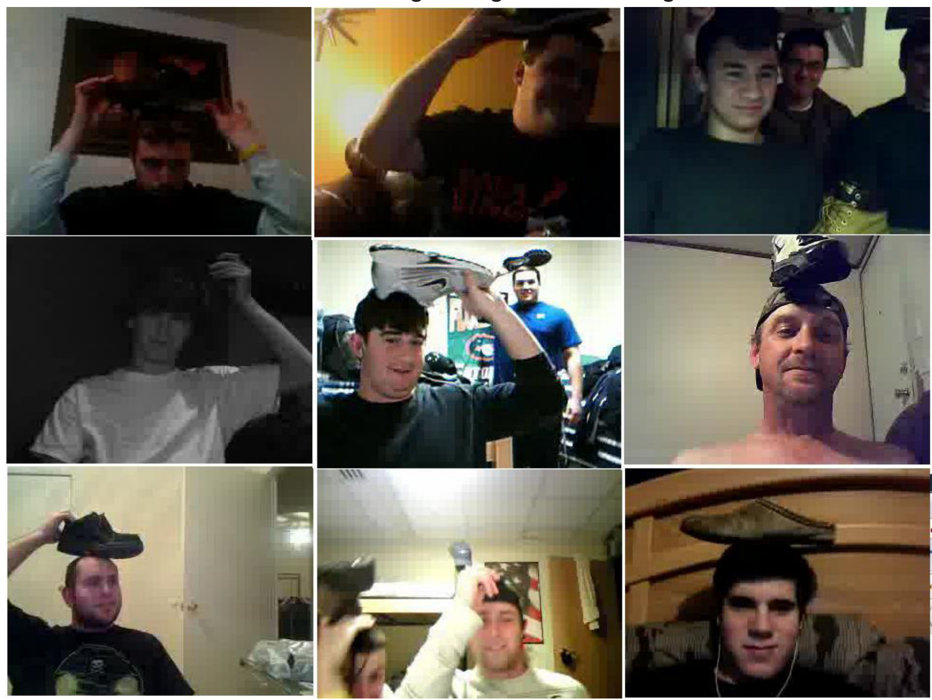


fig. 25: Chatroulette users with shoe on head. [176]

175 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Omegle logs. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Omegle/logs

176 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Shoe on Head. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/File:SHOE_ON_HEAD1.jpg

By using a program like ManyCam, you can use a video or a still image as your webcam image.
According to Encyclopedia Dramatica, [177] there are a few more things to consider when trolling with a fake webcam image:
If you are using ManyCam, be sure to turn off the logo.
When using any video that has sound, right-click on the video window and go to settings. Under the microphone tab, look for something like WavOut mix or Stereo mix. It lets them hear whatever you hear, including themselves, so check the box to reduce echo and keep inbound volume low.
You can find videos of webcamgirls on youtube or streaming porn sites.
With the Firefox-addon “Video Download Helper”, you can download and use them as source in ManyCam.
Make shure to recompress all videos as avi files with size 640x480 or 320x240.
When using a fake webcam image, getting people to put their shoe on head is, of course, not the only thing to do. Many trolls just use shock-images as their webcam image. This is much more rewarding to the troll, because he can see the victims reaction on the image. Tough this is easy to do, there are certainly more creative ways to troll with this technique.
Another technique is just wearing a strange costume to see reactions or using a puppet in front of your webcam. [178]
Really promising is the use of the Zalgo meme on chatroulette.
This is the definition of Zalgo from ohinternet.com:

> *“In short, Zalgo is a faux-Lovecraftian internet-based mythos typically accompanied with mangled text and vague implications that Zalgo will soon be destroying the world/the poster’s sanity/humanity. Zalgo is not necessarily an entity, but is more of a concept, much like Lovecraft’s “The Colour Out of Space.”* [179]

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177 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Chatroulette - Protips. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Chatroulette#Protips

178 Tanner Ringerud: 20 Great Chat Roulette Trollin’ Screenshots. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://www.buzzfeed.com/awesomer/the-20-greatest-chat-roulette-trolls-nsfw

179 Oh Internet: Zalgo. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://ohinternet.com/Zalgo







fig. x: Zalgo Garfield [180]



fig 26: typical Zalgo Photoshop [181]

While those creepy pictures are one part of the meme, the mentioned mangled text is another part of it. Technically it is normal text with lots of unicode characters attached. Those characters will eventually even go over the borders of textboxes. Many People don't know this and get creeped out by this alone. Those Zalgo texts are really easy to make with a generator like the one on http://eeemo.net/. When combining this text with an animated version of a Zalgo image, people that don't know the meme will likely be shocked.

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180 knowyourmeme: Zalgo. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/93822-zalgo

181 knowyourmeme: Zalgo. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/108727-zalgo

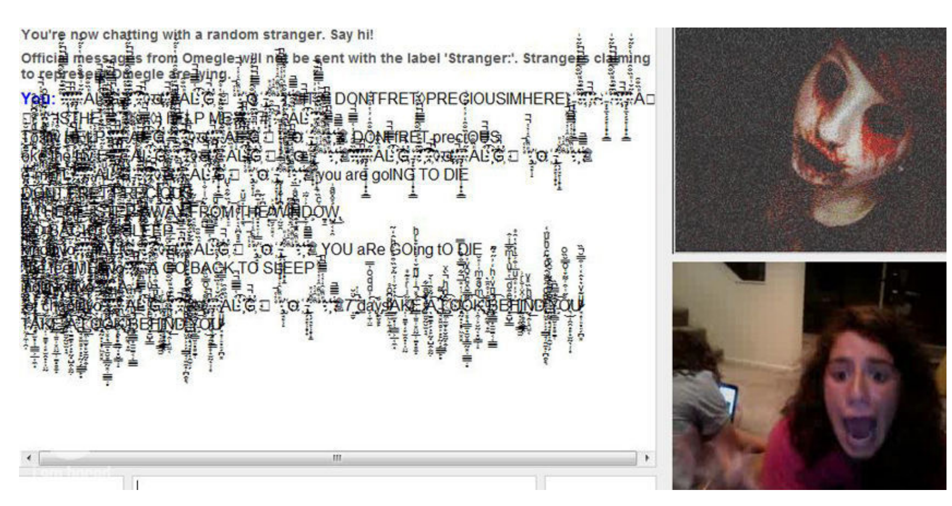


fig. 27: Omegle videochatter trolled by the Zalgo meme. [182]

Trolling Social Sites

When trolling sites like Facebook, you will often need an own identity for that purpose. when doing so, be sure to hide your friendlist since it is likely to be empty in a trollaccount. Also try to hide details such as the date of registration and other cues, that could identify you as a troll. When you are looking for a profile picture, do not search google images with terms like “guy wearing sunglasses” and take one of the first hits. Even tough these images often seem to fit, chances are that they are somehow known to some of your victims. Even if only one person may recognize your profile picture as fake, that person may flag your profile or inform the others, that it’s fake.

This is especially a problem, since google can do a reverse image search.

A better approach on getting to suitable pictures is to search for “DCIM” with Google Imagesearch and go to page 169, for example. DCIM is part of the default filenamesyntax, some digital cameras save in. By searching for this, you will likely get unedited photos straight out of a digital camera. Professionals won’t do this, so the chance of picking a picture of a somewhat famous person is rather low. Again, remember to pick a reasonable pictures. Fake profiles with supermodelesque photos already ring an alarm bell in anybody who is longer than two years on the Internet.

182 knowyourmeme: Zalgo. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/62273-zalgo

Some activities don't require false identity to troll.
You can troll your friends easily on Facebook.
One example would be to post a secret on your wall, that a good friend has commisioned to you. The important part about this is to set privacy so, that the message is only visible to you and that friend. He will see this message in his newsfeed and will panic since it appears, that everybody can read the secret.[183] Nevertheless be careful when doing this, because Facebook itself can read everything, even if it's hidden.
Another fun thing to do with privacy settings is only applicable, if you have access to the victims account. This is the case when someone goes to the bathroom and leaves facebook open unattended. Just edit their default privacy settings so, that nobody other than you and themselves can read the messages. If not leaving traces is more important to you than seeing the effects of your action, don't make it visible to yourself.
It will propably take your victim some time to discover what happened. Until then, he will be asking himself, why nobody likes or comments his posts anymore.



fig. 28: Facebook Troll with accomplices or sockpuppets [184]

Griefing

Trolling in games is called griefing and possibilities for griefers are endless. Generally, the more open a game is, the more possibilities exist to grief it. SecondLife is obviously one of the most griefed games of all.

183 knowyourmeme: Trolling. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/180587-trolling
184 The Art of Trolling: Facebook Troll. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://cheezburger.com/View/4273250816

Minecrafts multiplayer mode however has lots of griefers too.
Sadly, most of the griefers in minecraft only destroy random blocks or burn down structures and items by placing lava on them. These techniques are really uncreative and will produce low levels of amusement in other players. Therefore I will give some examples on how to grief Minecraft in a more classy way. Simply destroying everything is a way to cut the branch off on which we are sitting as griefers. People will stop playing and we won't have people left to grief.

One thing would be to build a small house with lots of TNT underneath. The floor in the house consists of pressure plates, which will blow up the whole house with everyone inside if someone enters it.
If you don't want to build a house, you can just bury TNT, put dirt on top of it, and wire it to a pressure plate on top of the TNT.
Also using pressure plates, you could create a trap door. This is even better, if the hole has walls of obsidian, which need a lot of time to break. When the victim dropped into the obsidian hole, it can be closed with another block of obsidian to seal the trap.
Another idea would be to dig a large dark room under your victims structure. Because of the darkness, monsters will spawn and make noises. If the victim finds the source for the noises, he will encounter an army of enemies.
Those are just a few ideas for griefing minecraft. There is no one way of trolling right and there are countless other ways to be a successful griefer.
If you need further inspiration, Minecraft wiki has a list with techniques. [185]

Trolling 4chan
Just don't do it!

It's like pissing in an ocean of piss.
If you really have the urge to troll 4chan, pretend to be a newbie or pretend to be an oldfag. To troll 4chan-users in a classy way, you first have to lurk the forums in order to get familiar with the culture. When this is done, a lot of ideas for minor trollings will come into your mind. To be a really successful troll on 4chan, you have to get the rear cover of a large part of 4chans users to help you.

185 Minecraft wiki: Griefing. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://www.minecraftwiki.net/wiki/Griefing

One example would be to come up with a method that only trolls newbies and those who are refered to “the cancer that is killing /b/”.[186]

Trolling YouTube

A popular theme for YouTube trolls is switch and bait. Just post a video, that includes something entirely different than what the title and the preview image suggests. Anyhow this is so common on YouTube, that it won’t raise eyebrows. Users will just downvote you and click the back button on the browser. Therefore it is mostly pointless.
Another once popular technique was to include sudden screamer images into a video that required users to concentrate on something on screen.
This is why most users check the coments and rating for a suspicious looking video before watching it.
Maybe the best way to troll on YouTube is via webcam videoblogs or in the comments to other videos. This however is not really YouTube specific.
Trolling the comments is most likely leading to lulz when it’s a video of a band with fanatic fans or if the owner of the video is a religious fanatic.

There is also a technique called cloning, where one user will clone an entire YouTube account of somebody else. The trick is to exchange capital i’s and small l’s. I and l look the same. Therefore it is possible to create an exact clone of your victims account. All you have to do is copy their name, videos and, in best case, their friendslist.
Like this you can act like an idiot under the name of someone else.

Trolling Wikipedia

Because of the lack of immediate reply and the small chances of making an impact, this is mostly boring. Wikipedia has an active userbase, which will control most of the content. The community behind Wikipedia is so aware of trolls, that trolling them has become too hard in relation to the little effects you get.

Trolling Yahoo Answers

Yahoo Answers and other similar sites are a good choice if you want to spread horrible advice or ask incredibly stupid questions that agitate many users.

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186 knowyourmeme: the cancer that is killing /b/. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/the-cancer-that-is-killing-b

This is an example for trolling such sites:

Q: When a guy says GO MAKE ME A SANDWICH what's a good comeback?
A: Well, you better comeback with a goddamn sandwich. [187]

Another famous question from the site is "how is babby formed?" [188]
If you are interested in trolling Yahoo Answers, Encyclopedia Dramatica has a good guide to it. [189]

Common Lolcows

Apart from the categories that were already explained here, there are certain groups of people, that are rather easy to troll.
Hackers or Sceners are likely to rage about wannabe hackers that use ph4t l33tspe4k sKillZzzZ!!1!1oneoneeleven.[190]

Other groups that are easy to troll are religious fanatics. This includes atheists. Just pointing out, that atheism is just like religion is annoying atheists to no end. Again, Encyclopedia Dramatica has an article with ready-to-use arguments to troll atheists. [191]

The next group of people that are easy to troll are fanboys of all kinds. Not only religious fanatics are great targets. Fanatic fans of bands or comics or Apple computers, or gaming consoles are great targets in that they are easily offended when you say something against their beloved targets of appreciation. In Germany, there was a young girl called Angie who got trolled hard after uploading a video to YouTube in which she threatens everybody who makes fun of her and other fans of the band Tokio Hotel.[192] As a result of all the trolls,

187 Yahoo Answers: When a guy says... as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://uk.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20100223093446AAzK2eM

188 Something Awful: Yahoo! Answers Revisited. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://www.somethingawful.com/d/weekend-web/yahoo-answers-revisited.php

189 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Yahoo Answers. as of Jan.17 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Yahoo_answers#How_to_troll_specific_categories

190 cf. Judith Donath: »Identity and Deception«, in: Marc A. Smith, Peter Kollock (ed.): Communities in Cyberspace. London 1999, p. 40

191 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Atheist. How to troll your average Atheist. as of Jan.18 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Atheist#How_to_troll_your_average_Atheist

192 YouTube: Angie-Lasst Tokio Hotel Fans in Ruhe - English Subs. as of Jan.18 2012
Url: http://youtu.be/AfjjZWYmKmE

she changed her mind and uploaded a rant on Tokio Hotel, proclaiming, that the trolls have cured her from her wrong beliefs.[193]
Mac- and PC-fanboys are also trolled easily. Just think about the endless possibilities.

Last but not least, trolls are really easy to troll. Imagine yourself putting up a video like that of Angie intentionally to agitate lots of trolls.
The trolls won't think that they are the ones who get trolled until you reveal the story. However, you should think of a clever way to reveal yourself before you start to troll the trolls.
This comic sums up the concept of "trolls trolling trolls" pretty good:

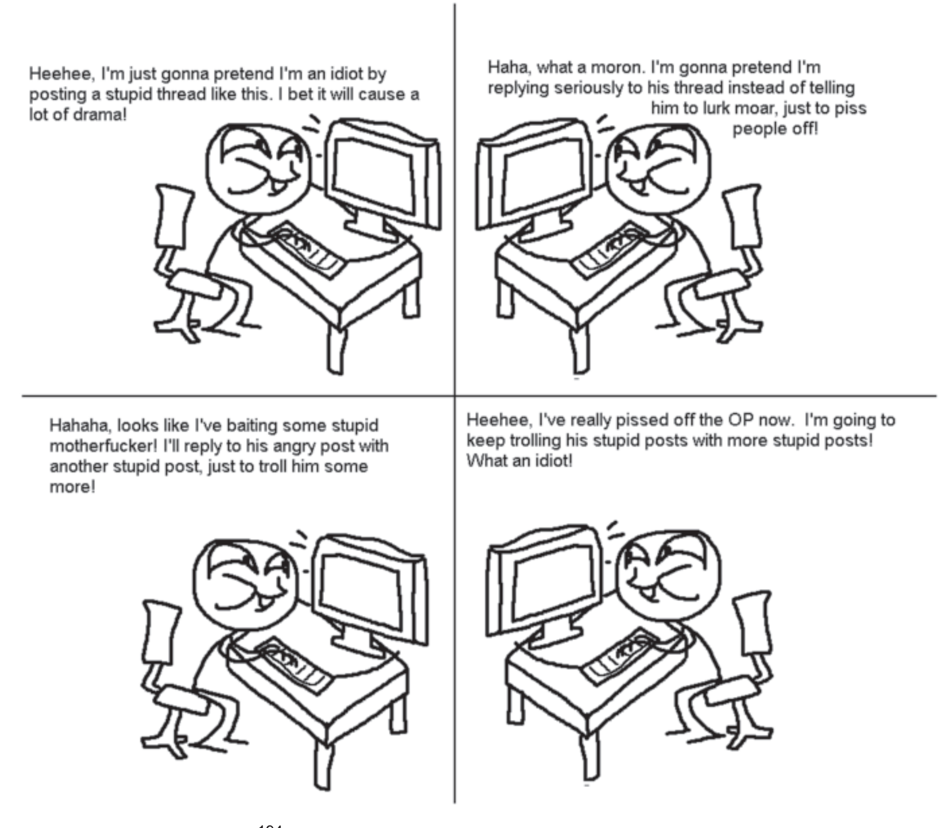


fig. 29: trolls trolling trolls [194]

193 YouTube: Angie ist kein Tokio hotel Fan mehr- English Subs. as of Jan.17 2012 Url: http://youtu.be/8YJXXcX-y_o

194 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Trolling101. as of Jan.18 2012 Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/File:Trolling101.png

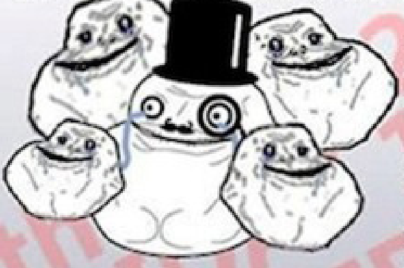
Fakesubs
This is a great way to troll fans of japanese anime.
Most anime don't get translated by the creators and therefore, non-japanese-speaking people have to rely on subtitles that were added by fans. If a troll changes these subtitles in a clever way, the average viewer won't even know he's been trolled.

Internet-Offline Mixup Troll
Sometimes great actions start on the Internet and end in offline reality.
The story of Agent Pubeit from chapter three or the Facebook Party that David Thorne organized are good examples. Another great example was an anonymous action called "Forever Alone Involuntary Flash Mob".
In this action, 4chan users created fake profiles on dating sites and made appointments with men. The meeting point was Friday 13th May of 2011
7:30 P.M. at a green payphone on times square.
This area was covered by webcams, so 4chans users could see all the disappointed men wandering around, not knowing what just happened. [195]

195 Vice: Forever Alone Involuntary Flashmob. as of Jan.18 2012
Url: http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/forever-alone-involuntary-flashmob

HOW TO MAKE YOUR VERY OWN:

FOREVER ALONE INVOLUNTARY FLASHMOB



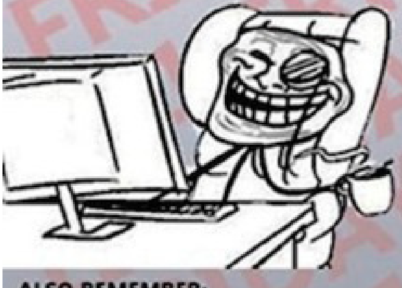
1. create fake online dating profile as mildly cute woman from NYC - just use somechicks facebook to get several believable pics etc. etc.

2. find forever alone guys from NYC on dating site, get them to believe you're interested.

3. Once forever alone guy takes the bait. suggest you meet for a date at this time and location:

Pay phones outside 47th Digital store
46th st & Broadway NEW YORK

7:30 PM
FRIDAY 13th May 2011



4. watch angry alone guys flashmob rage at earthcam.com/usa/newyork/timessquare/ (select CAMERA 2)

ALSO REMEMBER:
This will only work if we keep spreading these instructions and actually get involved. There is no limit to how many fake profiles and people you can trick or method used. Take time and prepare - think smart, if they suspect you're pushing the time and date too hard it aint gonna work.

fig. 30: Instructional poster from 4chan

Fight a Troll!

Now that we know how to troll the world, we should also know how to keep trolls under control.



fig. 31: Don’t feed the trolls! [196]

The best strategy to battle trolls is to not attract them in the first place.
If you, however, made the bad mistake of feeding the trolls, thus getting into their focus, it is hard to shake them off again.
On the next pages, I will describe how to fight back when trolls have already started to attack you:

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196 Davey Wavey: A Message for the Trolls. as of Jan.18 2012
Url: http://www.breaktheillusion.com/rant/a-message-for-the-trolls/

NOT

AT

ALL

If you already became a target for the trolls and now want to shake them off, all you have to do is resist the urge to fight back. While attacks on your virtual identity hurt you because it is a part of your person, trolls mostly use fake identities, that are uncoupled from their person. Therefore, no emotional connection between the troll and its online identity is given, making them effectively bulletproof.

In an interview with Mattathias Schwartz, Jason Fortuny came up with his Green Hair Analogy.

> *“Fortuny: ‘You have green hair. Did you know that?’*
> *Schwartz: ‘No,’*
> *Fortuny: ‘Why not?’*
> *Schwartz: ‘I look in the mirror. I see my hair is black.’*
> *Fortuny: ‘That’s uh, interesting. I guess you understand that you have green hair about as well as you understand that you’re a terrible reporter.’*
> *Schwartz: ‘What do you mean? What did I do?’*
> *Fortuny: ‘That’s a very interesting reaction. why didn’t you get so defensive when I said you had green hair?’*
>
> *(names added for clarity)*
>
> *If I were certain that I wasn’t a terrible reporter, he explained, I would have laughed the suggestion off just as easily. The willingness of trolling “victims” to be hurt by words, he argued, makes them complicit, and trolling will end as soon as we all get over it.”* [197]

He draws a line between hollow accusations, that can be easily proven wrong, and hard accusations, which can’t be proven wrong that simple and often enough are soft spots in their victims personality just because of this.
Trolls themselves hide their true identity and therefore mostly can’t be attacked with hard accusations, since they don’t offer those identity cues needed to work one out. And even if the victim hits one of these soft spots in the troll, he would never let you know.
Trolls also know, that even those hard accusations are only spoken out to do harm and not because it is the honest belief of the attacker. Therefore, if the troll knows (and he does instinctively), you didn’t mean this insult to him

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197 cf. Mattathias Schwartz: The Trolls Among Us. as of Jan.20 2012
Url: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/03/magazine/03trolls-t.html

personally, but as a desperate attempt to hurt you back, he can shield everything from his true personality and every attempt to fight back will bounce off from the metaphorical mask, the troll is wearing.

The only way to beat off the trolls is to make it as hard as possible to get lulz from you. If you are easily offended, you might be what is called a lol cow. [198] This is the definition of a lol-cow that encyclopedia dramatica gives:

> *“A lol-cow (latin: Rideo Risi Risum Bos taurus) is a victim of a Flame War who can’t help but be milked for lulz time and time again. They have a compulsive need to give up as many laughs as possible at their own expense despite themselves.”* [199]

Trolls will feed of your angry reactions, so do not feed the trolls.
When you become target of a large number of trolls at once, you shuld also consider to remove as much of your private information as possible from the net. When doing this you have to be very careful. Just delete or hide things, that the trolls didn’t already find. If you try to delete something off the Internet, or worse sue something off, after the trolls found it, you are likely to become a victim of the streisand effect:

This effect was named after actress and popstar Barbara Streisand when she sued a photographer in 2003 for displaying a picture of her house on a website. The photographer took a picture of it, along varios other houses to document coastal erosion. Nobody would have cared for it in the first place if Barbara Streisand didn’t try to take the photo off the internet. As news of this “censorship” spread, she generated so much buzz, that the picture in question got passed all over the internet. Today, it is even visible on Wikipedia. [200]

Even if you might not be Barbara Streisand, you should think about the risk of the streisand effect. When removing information about yourself from the internet, be sure to make it quiet.

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198 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Lol-Cow. as of Jan.20 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Lol-cow

199 Ibid.

200 Wikipedia: Streisand Effect. as of Jan.20 2012
Url: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Streisand_effect

Another important action is to change your passwords to something safe if the trolls have reached a certain grade of notoriety. It may also be a good idea to inform people that your profile might get hacked before it actually happens and the troll writes disgusting things under your name.
You might also want to inform a moderator of the site you are getting trolled on, if possible.
Also, sending them compliments may throw them out of their role.

Avoiding Trolls as an user

The best practice against trolls is to not become their target.
Ignoring them right from the start is the best technique.

No common rules exist in avoiding trolls other than that, but beeing careful what to put online and common sense mostly work fine.
It is generally good, not to display yourself in extremely eccentric ways to the public unless you think you can handle the trolls. Other than that, any kind of Internet Fame will get you haters and trolls, but these should really not hold you back from doing cool things.

This also does not mean, that you should withdraw every information about you from the Internet, because that would just make the Internet a very cold and lonely place.

It is really important to always assume good faith initially.

Avoiding Trolls as an admin

When it comes to dealing with trolls, one can see different interesting approaches on various sites. These are some of them:

Defining rules
If you are building a community, it is obviously always a good idea to set up rules, even if there aren‘t any rules to the quality of the content. This gives you as an admin legislation to ban offenders and people can be sure not to get banned as long as they don‘t disobey the rules.

No Rules
Another theory about rules in a community is from Jonathan Zittrains book „The Future of the Internet“. In this he mentions the dutch project „verkeersbordvrij“ [201], in which a town is freed of nearly all traffic signs. This project proved a counterintuitive result: A dramatic increase in vehicular safety.[202]
Without signs to obey mechanically, people are forced to drive more mindfully. The reason for this is, that when we face heavy regulation, we see and shape our behavior more in relation to reward and punishment by an arbitrary external authority, than because of a commitment to the kind of world our actions can help bring about.[203]
However, this technique does not always work alone. 4chan, for example, is a magnet for trolls, with its „laissez faire“ policy.
Wikipedia, on the other hand, started out with this principle of verkeersbordvrij[204] and it worked well in combination with the next principle.

Keep track of edits
A website that is very liberal with its users, is likely to become victim of trolls sooner or later. Therefore it is always good to include a system, that monitors changes and saves every version of the page independently.
This kind of system can be seen on Etherpad, or on Wikipedia.
Etherpad is a collaborative online text-editor, that allows multiple users to write on the same text simultaneously.

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201 Jonathan Zittrain: The Future of the Internet. London 2009, p.127 et seq.
202 Ibid.
203 Ibid. p.128
204 Ibid. p.133

Since everybody can just delete the whole text, an autosave feature that saves every keystroke and enables the other users to revert the text after it has been vandalized is embedded.
Wikipedia uses the same system.[205] If an edit is made, it will save a new version of the article without overwriting the old one. Every user of wikipedia can see your changes. Since people are not controlled by rules but by the motivation to create something good, that they have in common.

Keeping communities small

While this is not always to maintain, a small community is usually safer when it comes to trolling. Dunbars Number describes the border, until which every participant of the community might know the majority of the others.
Various numbers are proposed: 150, 230, 290...The key point is, that it determines the ultimate size of the capabilities of a community‘s members to sustain social relationships.[206]
In a community, where everybody knows everyone, a nice and friendly environment is much more likely, since users will have lesser problems to spot irregular behavior from the others. If a user happens to be a troll anyway, the group of users can still make decisions on how to deal with the troll and similar issues in the future. The community collapses when at a certain size of a group it turns into a society. Ferdinand Tönnies investigated the difference between community and society. In his definition of a community, it is made up by a small group of people, that don‘t need formal rules, because a sense of common mores or norms unite them.[207]
A society, by his definition, is a larger group, that can‘t rely on the same sense of norms. It is based on explicit rules that require enforcement.[208]

Educate your users

Telling your users about trolls is usually a good idea for a community. If users are aware of trolls, it is much more likely that nobody will feed them.
Wikipedia, for example, has its own guide on dealing with trolls.[209]

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205 Ibid. p.133 et seq.
206 Anaesthetica: Attacked from within. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://www.kuro5hin.org/story/2009/3/12/33338/3000
207 Ibid.
208 Ibid.
209 Wikipedia: What is a troll? Dealing with trolls. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/What_is_a_troll%3F#Dealing_with_trolls

Adding a hurdle

The forums of Something Awful have a very interesting approach to prevent trolls. Every user has to pay 10$ to register an account. This is a one-time fee, but if you get banned, which happens easily there, you will have to register a new account for 10$. This is why Something Awfuls users, use to say something along the lines of „10bux“[210] as a reply to any really stupid post on their forums. From my short time on the forum, I can already tell, that this seems to work pretty fine. You pay 10$ once to become a member of one of the most bizarre community on the web. Trolling Somthing Awful is still possible, but the fact, that it costs you a certain amout of money, prevents most trolls from doing so. Kuro5hin is another community that charges 5$ for signup to keep the trolls away.[211]

To generalize this, you could charge a signup-fee to keep the trolls out.
A major downside of this creation of walled gardens is, that people might be more afraid to say something controverse because they fear to get banned. Free expression might be in danger where this technique of regulation is applied, so fairness between moderators and users should be very important.

Another technique to keep out trolls is to ask very specific questions when registering an account.
I remember seeing this myself in a german forum for knifes.
Since fans of kitchen knifes are often real nerds, the question was really tricky for anybody who is not familiar with the topic.
The question was something like: „Which famous manufacturer is known for a hole in the blade?“. I didn‘t know the answer and a troll that is not familiar with knifes wouldn‘t know either. But since trolls surely can use google, this technique is pretty useless (the answer was „Spyderco“).
Apart from its uselessness against trolls, it sends a critical message of elitism in the direction of new users. Think of a guy that wants to know something about a certain type of kitchen knife and therefore tries to register an account. He is not the expert that can answer the question, but he may want to become one. Trying to filter out such people in the process of registering an username is, in most cases, damaging for a community.

210 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Something Awful. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Something_Awful#10bux

211 rusty: K5 Becomes “Gated Dysfunctional Community”. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://www.kuro5hin.org/story/2007/9/10/13920/3664

Bans

Finally, banning trolls is one of the most common methods against them. However, if the troll is really decided, he might just register a new username and continue. Also, if you are dealing with lots of trolls, you will have little time to research everyones motivation. Everybody that looks like a troll will be banned or sometimes even autobanned, regardless of collateral damage.
This can become very bizarre, like in the case of the Habbo Hotel Raid, where 4chans users raided a browser game for kids with black characters wearing an afro and business suit. After this action, being black, having an afro haircut and wearing a black business suite resultet in an autoban. [212]

Anti Griefers

Dealing with griefers largely depends on the game but there are some interesting ways, that games or modifications deal with them.

The Call of Duty series, for instance, features a killcam.
In the genre of First Person Shooters, cheaters are often using wallhacks, enabling them to see through walls, or aimbots, that automatically aim and land headshots every time. A combination of both is also common and even more frustrating for the other players. Therefore, the newer parts of the Call of Duty Series, has this killcam, where a player, upon his own screendeath, sees his killing out of the perspective of the player that shot him. In this perspective, the characteristic movement patterns of those cheats are clearly recognizable. In addition to that, the game runs on the creators own network which monitors every players activity. Each game is recorded by default and you can watch your own replays in a cinema mode. By this, it is really easy to record videos of cheaters as evidence and report them to the creators of the game whose task it is to ban the cheaters from the online games.
Minecraft, which is also suffering heavily from griefers, has an active community that developed mods for the games multiplayer mode.
At first, you should be careful on how and where you advertise your server. More publicity means more griefers. Also, admins should be fair to their users. If the admin threats the users bad, they will sometimes start to grief as a form of rebellion.[213]

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212 knowyourmeme: Pools closed. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/pools-closed

213 Minecraft Wiki: Griefer. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://www.minecraftwiki.net/wiki/Griefer

Server modifications against griefers include scripted lock, that only enable the legitimate owner of a crate to get to its precious content, or plugins, that prevent players from placing blocks, until an admin has given you the permission to do so. Sometimes only in a certain area.
Logging plugins log every action of the players like on Etherpad or Wikipedia, enabling the admin to revert the actions of a griefer. Many of those anti-griefer plugins are availible online.[214]

On SecondLife, the owners of virtual land can decide what the users are allowed to do on it. It‘s quite common to forbid dropping items and sometimes to fly around. This can prevent griefers from vandalising a place with large numbers of objects, but dedicated griefers will find a way to grief different.
An example for that would be Ralph Pootawn on whom I wrote in chapter 3. He just violated the unwritten social rules that exist on second life.

Community Controls
In case of Wikipedia, the formula is simple, as Clay Shirky puts it:

> *“A Wikipedia article is a process, not a product, and as a result, it is never finished. For a Wikipedia article to improve, the good edits simply have to outweight the bad ones. Rather than filtering contributions before they appear in public (the process that helped kill Nupedia), Wikipedia assumes that new errors will be introduced less frequently than existing ones will be corrected. This assumption has proven correct; despite occasional vandalism, Wikipedia articles get better, on average, over time.”* [215]

Youtube also uses a similar principle. The large number of users will flag inappropriate content and upvote good content. This grants that the first page is always filled with high-rated content, while trolls will get downvoted and, if their video violates the code of conduct, deleted by a moderator.
This type of crowd control works really well in nearly all cases, as everybody can see on the site. However, when anonymous started their YouTube Porn Day, they engineered the attack so, that the usual mechanisms don‘t work. A very large amount of pornographic content was uploaded at once, tagged with false names and often edited together with normal videos.

214 Minecraft Wiki: Mods. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://www.minecraftwiki.net/wiki/Mods#Server_Mods
215 Clay Shirky: Here comes everybody. New York 2009, p.119

The community flagged those videos, but there were so many, that the moderators didn‘t manage to delete them all immediatelly. This especially got more complicated for them, when 4chans users decided to flag normal content as inappropriate to create confusion. Because of this action, the signal to noise ratio the moderators get through the reports was really low. It took the team of YouTube several hours to clean up their site.
Apart from these extreme situations, these mechanisms work very well to prevent trolls.

A downside is, that this leads to groupthinking. Only the popular videos will get more popular and most new videos don‘t get more than 30.000 views on youtube. The same problem applies to various other places, like reddit.

Anonymity
While most people argue, that anonymity will lure the trolls, kuro5hin user Anaesthetica issued the interesting thought of anonymity as a gain for the community’s quality.

> *“Anonymity counters vanity, instilling some degree of egolessness into users. Ad hominems are less effective, and the substance of the comment means more than the person saying it.”* [216]

In an anonymous system, trolls would have problems to sustain their unwarranted self-importance and baiting or harassing individual users is near impossible. This does not prevent all forms of trolling, but it mitigates some forms. [217]

Identity
A persistent identity allows for effective control through moderation, rewards and penalties.[218]

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216 Anaesthetica: Attacked from within. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://www.kuro5hin.org/story/2009/3/12/33338/3000

217 Ibid.

218 Anaesthetica: Attacked from within. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://www.kuro5hin.org/story/2009/3/12/33338/3000

Douglas Rushkoff describes Identity as one of the most important prerequisites to maintain a human internet.

> *"Our digital experiences are out-of-body. This biases us toward depersonalized behaviour in an environment where one's identity can be a liability. But the more anonymously we engage with others, the less we experience the human repercussions of what we say and do. By resisting the temptation to engage from the apparent safety of anonymity, we remain accountable and present-and much more likely to bring our humanity with us into the digital realm."*[219]

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219 Douglas Rushkoff: Program or be Programmed: Ten commands for a digital age. Berkeley 2010, p. 84

Trolling as a meme

Troll Culture today is more than just acting after the definition of a troll.

Trollface

DeviantArt user Whynne created the iconic trollface, in an attempt to draw a figure called “Rape Rodent”, which is a creepy looking drawing of Mighty Mouse. [220]



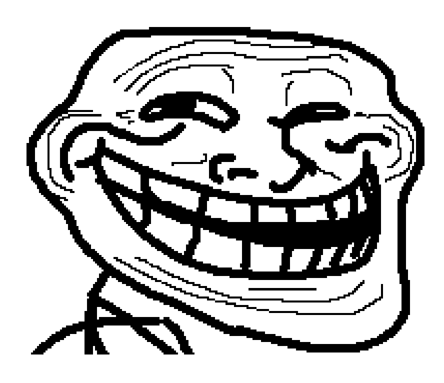


fig. 32 & 33: Rape Rodent[221] and Trollface[222]

In the initial comic that featured trollface, Whynne wanted to criticise false trolls. People write incredibly stupid arguments online and upon corrected by someone else, they realize how stupid their first post was. Instead of admitting that they were wrong, they’d pretend to have been trolling all the time.
It describes people, that use the pretense of trolling to excuse themselves from poor reasoning.[223]
However, the facial expression somehow fitted to how many people imagined trolls would look when they are doing their actions.

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220 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Rape Rodent. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Rape_Rodent

221 Ibid.

222 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Trollface. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Trollface

223 $Heidi: An interview with Trollface’s creator. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://heidi.deviantart.com/journal/A-Trollface-April-Fools-214248153





fig. 34: “Comic - Trolls” by Whynne [224]

224 Whynne: Comic - Trolls. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://whynne.deviantart.com/art/Comic-Trolls-98357844

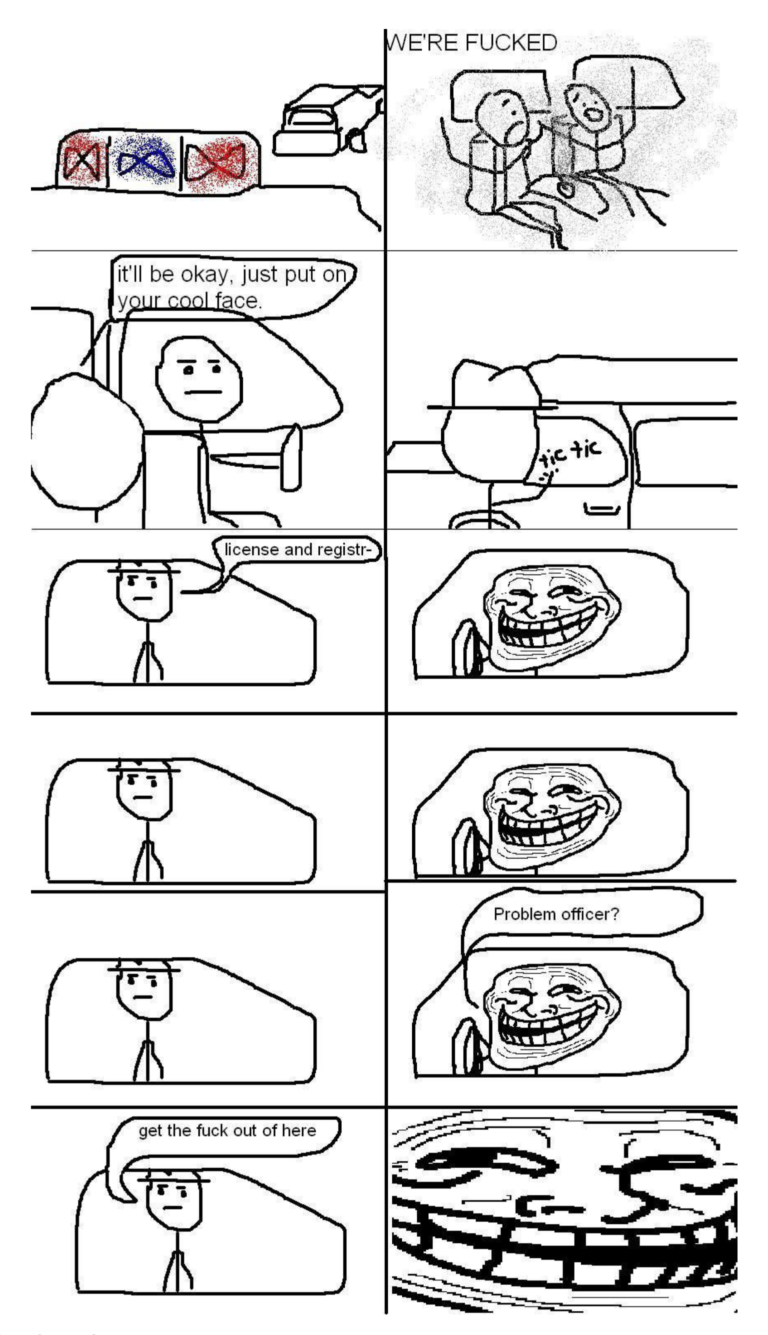


fig. 35: Coolface. Source unknown. Propably 4chan.

After the original comic got posted to 4chan and sparked remakes, somebody made another comic with that face, calling it coolface. Altough the author remains unknown, the comic got so popular, that many people started calling Trollface Coolface. The catchphrase “Problem?” also stems from this second comic, which was then associated with trollish escaping of mischievous or just stupid situations.
Today, Trollface is used widely and has, in certain parts of the Internet, become a part of a visual language to indicate trolling.
This is often done in a comedic nature, like saying
“Dude, he/she gotta be trollin’!”



fig. 36: Charlie Brown trolled [225]



fig. 37: Trolling in Spain [226]

225 knowyourmeme: Trollface. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://208.85.144.97/photos/86114-trollface-coolface-problem

226 knowyourmeme: Trollface. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://i1.kym-cdn.com/photos/images/original/000/079/062/Troll_.PNG



fig. 38: Columbus as a troll [227]

In addition to this, Trollface became a part of the Rage-Comic scene. Again, it is used to indicate a troll.



fig. 39: Ragecomic [228]

227 knowyourmeme: Trollface. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://208.85.144.97/photos/38299-trollface-coolface-problem

228 memebase.com: And I Thought Your Litter Box Smelled Bad. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://ragecomics.memebase.com/2011/12/15/rage-comics-and-i-thought-your-litter-box-smelled-bad/

In 2011, after his Trollface became common all over the internet, its creator Whynne threatens one of the largest communities for ragecomics, reddits f7u13 subreddit, with a lawsuit for copyright infringement.[229]
He demanded for the community to be shut down, or to be monitored effectively for violations of his copyright to the original trollface.
This action spawned extremely angry and frustrated reactions from the community. In Internet slang, this is refered to as a "Shitstorm".
Altough his motivation is not 100% clear, it was almost sure, that he trolled reddit when he wrote this comment:

> *"You know what also makes me happy?*
> *Trolling reddit and seeing a shitstorm like this develop."* [230]

Later, while SOPA was in discussion, Whynne posted a journal on his deviantArt page entitled, „A message to le redditors" which read:

> *"If SOPA passes, I'm going to have a fucking field day, and you're first on my list. Tell your friends."* [231]

In my opinion, he is a really successful troll!

Trollscience, Trolldad and others

The idea of Trollface evolved and sparked a variety of related memes. Trollscience is the idea of creating images about pseudoscientific paradoxes. Like often with memes from 4chan, it is hard to track the development, but the prequel to Trollscience could have been a music video of the Insane Clown Posse, published in 2010, in which they declared common scientific facts as miracles, while stating that scientists are lying.

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229 Reddit: looks like f7u12 is done. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://www.reddit.com/r/fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/ir9kx/looks_like_f7u12_is_done/

230 Reddit: Whynne comments on looks like f7u12 is done. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://www.reddit.com/r/fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/ir9kx/looks_like_f7u12_is_done/c26bo1y?context=3

231 Whynne: A message to le redditors. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://whynne.deviantart.com/journal/#/d4m7uma

Especially the phrase “fucking magnets, how do they work?” became a meme and lots of remixes including magnets were made. [232]
After the Insane Clown Posse turned into a meme, they stated, that this was all planned out from the beginning. They claimed, they were trolling. Of course nobody believed them.

Altough there is no verifyable connection between the magnets meme and troll science, I find it highly plausible, that it inspired the first troll science comic, which appeared later that year. [233]

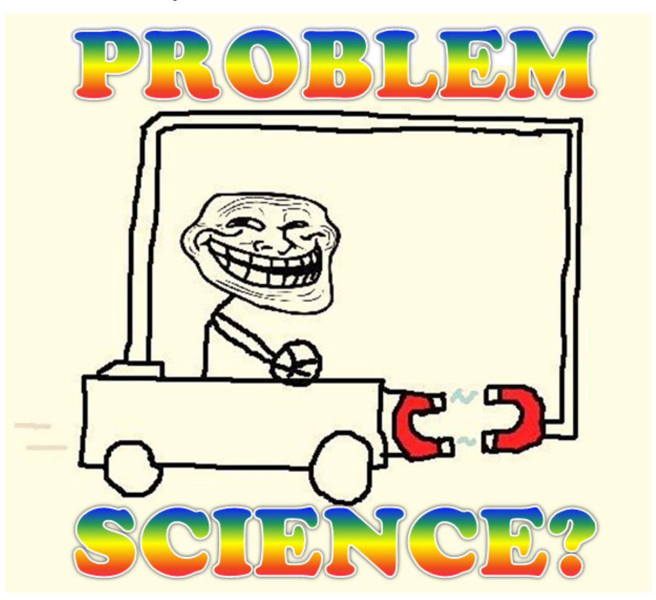


fig. 40: a derivate of the first known troll science comic [234]

232 knowyourmeme: fucking magnets, how do they work?. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/fcking-magnets-how-do-they-work

233 knowyourmeme: Troll Science. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/troll-science-troll-physics

234 Encyclopedia Dramatica: Troll Science. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Troll_Science

Another incarnation of Trollface was Trolldad, which consisted of comics in which a father trolls his son or daughter.

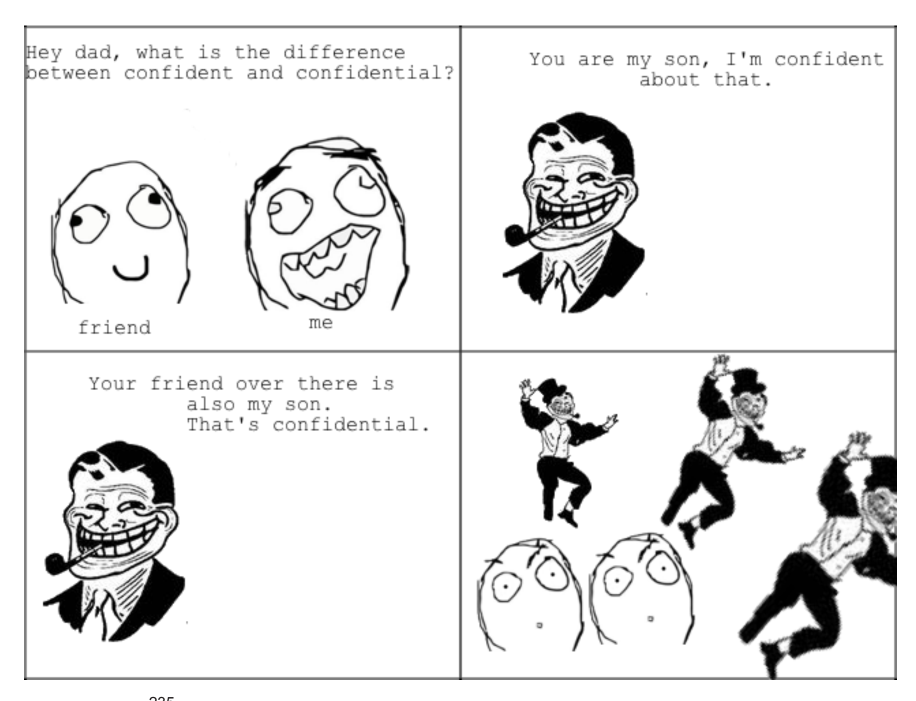


fig. 41: Trolldad [235]

Those two memes are just examples for the versatility and the evolution of memes just as a basic thought, that lies beneath every one of these variations.

The trollface has become a peircian icon, for the construct of thought behind trolling and slightly changes its message depending on the context in which it appears.

235 knowyourmeme: Trolldad. as of Jan.22 2012
Url: http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/96686-trolldad

Problem?

The Internet has become ubiquitous and people that are using it, are not thinking about it anymore. It's just there. Since it has been designed for openness, this arises problems, when people don't ponder on their role on the Internet and use the openness in an unreflected way, say to display oneself.
This lures the trolls, who often posess a larger amount of media cempetence and find the weak points in the constructs of the unaware.
On the one hand, it serves us with good lulz and often educates newbies.
On the other hand, some forms of trolling create a hostile environment, which will influence the culture of the internet in a bad way.
This leads us to the first conclusion:

You can and must understand troll culture now!

By understanding the phenomenon and its functioning, we can evaluate the up- and downsides individially for each action. Creative, classy trolling is a beautiful thing when executed well and I find it sad, that the tenor about trolling is so negative, as of this writing. This is a waste of potential.

Annother problem is, that trolls traditionally think in two categories. Internet and Real-Life. With the ubiquity of the Internet, this too changed finally.
While people always had some forms of emotional connections to their avatars or websites, current changes interweave so called Real Life and Internet even more. While pseudonymity was a norm in the 90s, it disappeared with the rise of Facebook and Google. This brought an influx of people, that didn't care about the computer or the network on its technical layer, but wanted to socialise with friends online, under their real names, like in "Real Life".
Given this, even the greatest critic of the concept has to admit, that the Internet finally IS Real Life, just as much as your Job, your Family, etc...
Our online life has strong impacts on our offline live and vice versa.
The problem with some of the most cruel trollings is, that some trolls have not realized this change.

This leads us to the second conclusion:

Trolls must understand, that Internet is Real Life!

Because trolling is a constant on the Internet, this conclusion would never stop the malicious, live destroying kind of trolling, as seen in the case of Jessi Slaughter. Maybe, there will be a new profession of troll blazers, those who find delight in the task of helping people that are hunted by the enormous mass of the trolls. Specialists in Internet Culture at marketing agencies often already know how to deal with trolls. However, the skill of professional advice should not be limited to few marketing experts that help big businesses.

Teachers should be educating how to avoid trolling in school. That doesn’t mean, that children should learn to stop doing anything online in order to avoid trolls. It should be differenciated. After all, trolls usually go for the naive and the vain. Trolls like to mock those, that promise to give the most lulz.
“‘Lulz’ is the pleasure derived from provoking and/or observing unjustifiable internet rage”[1], so if you are mad, take some time to think if your actions are still adequate. This all leads us to the third conclusion:

The Internet is not a place to live out your excessive vanity or unwarranted self-importance!

Problem?

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